

Si tomaste no manejes

The loss of a verbal category distinction in Rioplatense
A usage-based approach to the expansion of the Preterit

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Preface

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1. Introduction

Langacker (1987:369) states that “[m]ost symbolic units are variable in both form and meaning. How to account for this variation is a pivotal issue for our understanding of grammatical organization”. The present work aims to investigate such a case of variation in process: to describe a particular feature of the Spanish variety spoken in the Argentinean capital Buenos Aires (henceforth *Rioplatense*¹). Through data collected from informants of four age groups, I will show how the Perfect² is practically lost from the speech of young language users, and provide evidence that this change has taken place during the last hundred years.

What is so special about this development? The typical development for perfects is to extend their function and become markers of past. While this development is observed in a number of Romance languages, as well as standard Spanish, the development in the Spanish variety of Buenos Aires seems to reflect the opposite development; the Preterit is expanding and replacing the Perfect.

Bybee (2001:4) notes that “substance and form are related via the process by which the structure is created”. Such a process of relation is exemplified through the *paths of development* postulated in Bybee et al. (1994). Bybee goes as far as to call these paths, which predict semantic development of changing constructions, “universals” (2003). The more specific claim (1994:12) is that “the source meaning uniquely determines the grammaticization path that the gram will travel in its semantic development”. So, if a certain construction³ starts to grammaticalize, it is expected to develop into a certain target meaning. For instance, the resultative is expected to become a perfect and later continue its development into a perfective or simple past; Bybee et al. state (1994:86) that “the change of an anterior to past or perfective is typical for grammaticization changes”.

¹ The choice to label the variety *Rioplatense* may seem strange since the present work treats only the Buenos Aires variety. Nevertheless, the similarities between the varieties spoken around the Río de la Plata are substantial, and I therefore find my choice legitimate. It is also a more practical term than “Buenos Aires Spanish”.

² ‘Perfect’ (with capital P) is used to refer to the category, while ‘perfect’ refers to function. For instance, the French *Perfect* has no longer *perfect* function. When the terms ‘anterior’ or ‘anteriority’ is used, as in the quotations by Bybee, it is used to cover *both* the category and the function (she uses this term in order not to confuse the perfect with the perfective). ‘Preterit’ (with capital P) refers to the language specific category as well, and ‘past’ primarily to function.

³ Goldberg (2006:3) defines constructions as “[c]onventionalized pairings of meaning and form”. However, I follow Bybee and Eddington (2006) in not defining morphemes as individual constructions, but rather as “defined by the construction they appear in” (2006:327).

The present case is what seems to be an exception from this process. In Rioplatense, the Perfect has experienced a development reverse to what the paths predict. I will show that the Perfect can be assumed to have been dramatically more frequent a hundred years ago. Today, it is almost completely absent in the younger speakers of Rioplatense, and the Preterit has replaced it completely, erasing the aspectual distinction between the two. Left is a *perfective*; a simple past that contrasts with the imperfective in the past tense.

Because of the limited scope of the present work, my main emphasis will not primarily be on explaining the change in question (however tempting elaborating such a topic may be). I will emphasize the different functions/meanings of the perfect category, and investigate whether these have been replaced to the same extent by the preterit. In addition, I will discuss three major findings in the data, namely the possible grammaticalization towards perfect marker of the adverb *ya* (meaning ‘already’), the striking frequency of a grammaticalized construction with the form of past, and the fact that the change seems to have manifested first in the 2SG. But above all, I will provide evidence for a major morphosyntactic change that has occurred in the Spanish of Buenos Aires the last hundred years, and that has not been studied in a satisfying way.

1.1 Past research on the subject

1.1.1 Predictions about semantic development

There have been done extensive studies on the phenomenon of grammaticalization. Unidirectionality is also a well studied phenomenon, and many attempts have been made to find counterexamples (e.g. Hopper and Traugott 2003:130-138). The unidirectionality hypothesis predicts the developing functions of a construction, and that this development always happens in the direction content word > function word, and not the other way around. In this sense, unidirectionality refers to function in a very general way. A different question is whether it is possible to make more *specific* predictions about the developing semantics and functions of a grammaticalized construction. When a construction becomes grammaticalized, what meaning does it develop? When this meaning changes, which is the common target meaning? According to various linguists, it is possible to make predictions about the semantic development of grammaticalized constructions.

The main contributions in the field of the semantics and functions of grammaticalizing constructions are those of Bybee and her colleagues (e.g. 1990, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2007). As I will discuss in chapter 2, they argue on empiric grounds that there exist so called “paths of development”, which predict the semantic and formal development of grammaticalizing constructions. The tendency is clear; and in our specific case, the so-called “perfective path” is relevant. This path predicts the development from resultative to perfect and finally perfective or simple past. Parallel paths can be predicted for other source meanings (see 2.4 for details).

The explanation for such a tendency is difficult to capture. Still, it is plausible that the reason stems from the way we tend to repeat and categorize; that is, the general cognitive abilities that govern language use (elaborated in chapter 2). Bybee et al. (1994:86) argue that the change from perfect marker to past marker stems from frequency of usage; the perfect may be used more often than strictly necessary (that is, in contexts that normally do not call for the perfect), because the speaker may wish to add a flavour of relevance to his or her contribution. Such frequency of use weakens the current relevance component of the perfect (see 2.2.1.1), eventually making the speaker only infer past or perfective action from the perfect.

From a purely psycholinguistic point of view, the preference for periphrastic forms (like the Perfect, as opposed to the Preterit, which it tends to replace), can be explained in terms of how we process language. Slobin (1979:189) argues that “[t]here are universal constraints on the degree to which a language system can be compact and still be meaningful and processible”. That is, the more compact (i.e. synthetic) an item is, the less processible is it. And the other way around; more transparent constructions (i.e. analytical/periphrastic) are faster processed. This could suggest why the periphrastic perfect tends to replace the synthetic preterit, why the synthetic future tends to disappear in the favour of a periphrastic counterpart, and so on. Nevertheless, such an approach seems incompatible with the fact that there do exist highly synthetic languages. If there is such thing as a psycholinguistic preference for periphrases, why do these languages exist? It may be possible to view such language states as the product of two different forces governing language use; on one hand, the psycholinguistic urge for analyticity, on the other hand the constant erosion, fusion and reduction of form that is result of the frequency of a construction. Langacker (2002:101) states that “[e]conomy must be consistent with psychological reality”; this is precisely why the fusing and reducing (that is, economizing) processes are constrained.

The generalization of a perfect into a simple past or perfective (depending on the existence of an imperfective) is well known and has been treated in several other works (see for instance Comrie 1976, Fleischman 1982, Dahl 1985, Anderson 1982, Heine and Kuteva 2002). Not only has this change been attested for Romance languages such as French, Romanian and Italian (though only in the northern varieties), but also German, Dutch, Afrikaans, pidgin Fulfulde (Theil, personal communication), the Creole Krio (Givón 1982:151) and Late Biblical Hebrew (Givón 1977). Other theorists (e.g. Klausenburger 2000) emphasize what they see as the *cyclic* nature of these changes; a synthetic form is replaced by a periphrastic form, the periphrastic form synthesizes and is eventually replaced by a new periphrastic construction and so on. Still, these cycles may well be seen as the natural result of language use; a periphrastic construction replaces a synthetic construction in which the elements have become so fused that it is no longer easily processible, the new construction eventually undergoes the same fusion with the host and phonological reduction, and consequently triggers the grammaticalization of a new construction. These may be similar to the two driving forces mentioned above.

However, the fact that there do exist counterexamples to these paths has received surprisingly little attention. The only work I have found on the opposite development, in this case that of a perfect disappearing and a preterit gaining terrain is Buescher (2004), which discusses the increasing use of the Preterit in contexts that typically call for the Perfect in American English, using the Santa Barbara Corpus of spoken American English. This article is particularly interesting because it studies a development of a construction that seems to have a counterpart in Rioplatense. The construction investigated is ‘Did I tell you’. Buescher notes that in 28 % of the cases where a Preterit was used instead of a Perfect, the verb in question was ‘tell’. According to her, this construction always carries the function of current relevance, and therefore, it is possible to conclude that the extension of the preterit is “not so much an extension of a single function, but instead of a single construction which extends in its range of use”. As we shall see in chapter 5, this finding is particularly relevant to the present topic, as there exists a high frequency construction in Rioplatense, which also carries current relevance and functions as an actualizer. The Argentinean case, which I now turn to, has not, much like the counterexamples mentioned above, received much attention.

1.1.2 The Argentinean case

The fact that the Preterit is used more frequently in American varieties of Spanish than in the standard language is mentioned by several Spanish linguists (e.g. Penny 2000, 2002). Kany (1967) describes the high frequency of the Perfect as opposed to the Preterit in varieties of Spanish in South America. He stresses that “[i]n the early language the simple preterit (*vine* ‘I came’) must have been well distinguished from the present perfect (*he venido* ‘I have come’)” (1967:161), but argues that the frequency of the Preterit is generally higher in South American varieties of Spanish than in Standard Spanish. This suggests that the tendency was clear even fifty years ago, but also supports the claim that the complete taking over of the Preterit in some varieties is rather new, as discussed in chapter 3 (cf. “the early language”, though what stage this refers to is somewhat unclear).

Westmoreland (1998:384) describes the distribution as a “slower American evolution towards the periphrastic present perfect [...]”, implying that it will eventually become more frequent. Penny (2000:160) claims that American varieties of Spanish have progressed to stage 2 on the grammaticalization chain (4 being the stage where the perfect generalizes to perfective/simple past). This way, he assumes that such a development *will* happen. Whereas this may well be the case for certain varieties of American Spanish (it has been attested for the Mexican variety, see Lope Blanch 1972), it is certainly not the case for the Buenos Aires variety. As I will show in chapter 4, there is good evidence for stating that the Perfect was far more frequent a hundred years ago. This claim is also supported by my data, in which the older informants use the Perfect quite frequently, but it is almost completely absent in the younger speakers.

In addition, the studies of the preterit/perfect distinction in American Spanish varieties typically omit two elements. First, they ignore the fact that there are important differences in frequency and distribution in the different spoken varieties. As my data show, the Perfect does hardly occur in the speech of young Porteños⁴, it does, however, indeed occur in young rural Uruguayans’ speech, where it seems to be preferred. Such a tendency has also been attested for the spoken variety of North Argentina (Escobar 1997). Second, the phenomenon is often “explained” by the emigration from Spain via the Canary Islands to South America. According to Penny (2000:161), the spread took place because of emigrants from the north-

⁴ *Porteños* is what the inhabitants of Buenos Aires are called. In lack of an English counterpart, I will use this term.

western parts of Spain (where the Preterit is preferred) passed by the Canary Islands and this way introduced a variety where the perfect was infrequent. This contact hypothesis seems both dubious and simplified. First of all, because there is no doubt that the Perfect does indeed exist in most parts of the American Spanish speaking world, even though it is infrequent (and as I will show, though it hardly occurs in the speech of young people from Buenos Aires). In addition, my evidence strongly suggests that it was indeed frequent a hundred years ago. This means that it is obvious that the Perfect *has* been introduced to the natives, and *later* decreased in frequency. Heine (1997:109) also points out that the replacement of the source of the Romance Perfect, *habere*, with a lexical verb denoting possession, *tenere*, dates back to the 12th century, which indicates that the grammaticalization had reached a stage where *habere* was used primarily as an auxiliary, and that the perfect/preterit distinction was alive already then. Also, the hypothesis that such a tendency would spread due to contact is improbable; not all immigrants came from parts of Spain where the parallel phenomenon was attested. Therefore, the two forms must have coexisted. It is highly unlikely that in such a contact situation the Preterit, with all its irregularities, would replace the analytic, more regular Perfect (Joan Bybee, personal communication).

Menegotto (2004) points out that while the lexical and phonological differences of South American Spanish varieties have been studied in detail, the morphosyntactic properties have received far less attention. In her investigation of the distribution of the Perfect and the Preterit in the Spanish of Buenos Aires, she states (2004:64) that “[t]hough none of the two forms are lost, one of them has a much higher frequency and a notably different meaning” (my translation). In a way, this is concordant with the present findings. Still, it is important to emphasize that the occurrences of the preterit were so few (5 tokens among the young speakers), that it is possible to talk of precisely that; loss of one form.

In addition, Menegotto studied Argentinean speakers’ grammaticality judgements of constructions of Perfects and Preterits combined with temporal markers. She found that the majority of the Argentinean informants accepted the grammaticality of the Perfect in combination with temporal markers that normally do not fit the functional domain of the perfect. Interestingly, the Spanish control group did not accept the grammaticality of the same constructions.

The informants were tested on the following constructions:

Table 1. Judgement of grammaticality

Spanish informants	Argentinean informants
Ayer ganaron el partido	Ayer ganaron el partido
*Ayer han ganado el partido	Ayer han ganado el partido

(From Menegotto 2004:64)

Ayer **ganaron** el partido
ayer gan-aron el partido
yesterday win-3PL.PRET the match
'They won the match yesterday'

Ayer **han ganado** el partido
ayer han gan-ado el partido
yesterday have 3PL.PRES.IND win-PAST.PART the match
'They have won the match yesterday'

This shows that the Spanish informants judge the Perfect construction with the temporal marker as ungrammatical. This is in accordance with the typical use of the perfect as describing a past action with current relevance. Standard Spanish has (as well as for instance English and Norwegian) a constraint on what temporal specifications may be used with the perfect, and requires that the time of the past action be very recent if the perfect is to be used (cf. Comrie 1976:54). However, as Comrie (1976:60) points to, "while present relevance does not imply recentness, recentness may be a sufficient condition for present relevance". That is, the perfect may be used in sentences that do not denote recentness, but still denote relevance to the moment of speech ('I have been to New York many times'). But it may also be used when the situation referred to is so recent that it is perceived as relevant ('I have just returned from New York').

In the construction in question, the time of the action is presumably too distant for the Spanish informants to accept it. Interestingly, it is acceptable to Argentinean informants. Why? The Perfect is very infrequent in the Argentinean variety. However, it is likely that their judging the sentence as grammatical has to do precisely with the fact that the opposition between the

two is completely disappearing (as my data suggest), and that the Perfect is seen as an alternative construction that conveys the same meaning as the preterit. Therefore, the Argentinean informants judge them both as grammatical, whereas the Spanish informants do not, because the opposition is alive in their spoken variety. The Argentinean informants have no intuition as to there being any opposition between the two. However, the author provides no information on how the experiment was conducted. It should therefore be added that the basis for this experiment is highly hypothetical; this construction (*Ayer han ganado el partido*) is not taken from an actual corpus, and it is very unlikely that it would ever be used by any native speaker of the Buenos Aires Spanish variety (no constructions of this type occurred in my data). The experiment may well have been conducted orthographically, which is a further indication that the outcome may be a case of hypercorrection (cf. Labov 1983) towards the Standard Spanish norm. The Perfect is frequent in the standard variety, but not in the Argentinean variety. The Perfect construction may have been accepted by the Argentinean informants as a result of this; they do not use this construction, and probably never would, but feel they should accept it since they are aware of the fact that the Perfect is associated with a Standard Spanish variety. However, the fact that they did accept the construction as grammatical suggests that the distinction is no longer alive in their spoken variety.

Ultimately it should be noted that relaxation of the requirement of recency of the action described by the perfect is a major element in the development from perfect to past (Comrie 1976:61). As we saw in Menegotto's experiment, the Spanish informants did not accept the perfect to co-occur with the temporal marker denoting 'yesterday'. However, if Spanish speakers from Madrid were asked about the grammaticality of a construction [Perfect + 'this morning'], there is a good chance they would accept it. Even though 'this morning' is usually not 'recent enough' to be expressed using the perfect, it is so in Standard Spanish because the Perfect is gaining terrain (Comrie 1976:61). This is typical of grammaticalization changes; specific meaning components disappear (cf. 2.1.2.2).

Apart from the few papers mentioned, the Perfect in Rioplatense has to my knowledge only been treated thoroughly in one work, *Anteriority marking in British English, German and Argentinean Spanish* (Burgos 2004). However, this work has a slightly different goal than that of the present; it emphasizes that anteriority is not purely marked morphologically on the verb, but can be expressed through other means, as in the following examples:

(1)

[VERB_{PRES/IMPF} OBJ desde hace TEMPORAL SPECIFICATION]

Conozco a Juan desde hace dos años

cono-zco a juan desde hace dos años

know-1SG.PRES.IND since do-3SG.PRES.IND two years

‘I have known Juan for two years’

(2)

[acabar de + VERB_{INF}]

Juan acaba de ser asesinado

juan acab-a de ser asesin-ado

juan stop-3.SG.PRES.IND of be INF kill-PAST.PART

‘Juan has just been killed’⁵

Here, the sense of anteriority is expressed through the use of the present. However, though these are interesting findings, the use of such periphrases can hardly be regarded as a property particularly typical of Argentinean Spanish; these are constructions that exist in all varieties of Spanish. Strangely, Burgos also *emphasizes* the way the Perfect is used in Buenos Aires Spanish, even though he recognizes its low frequency. One reason for this may be that he uses both oral and written sources as data. As Menegotto (2004:65) points out, a great percentage of her informants state that they never use the Perfect in the spoken language, but may well do so in writing. Therefore, one should be careful when generalizing on the basis of written sources, since Standard Spanish is the norm and may well be more influent in the written than in the spoken language.

As a whole, the work that has been done on the distribution of the Perfect and the Preterit in Rioplatense Spanish is generally oversimplified (Burgos 2004 being the exception), and also to some extent largely inadequate. For example, Westmoreland (1998) claims that the Perfect in American Spanish is *not* used in describing ongoing situations, but as we shall see in chapter 4, this is not the case for the informants from Buenos Aires. In addition, he states that

⁵ As the reader may notice, there is actually a possibility of translating the Spanish preterit into an English preterit: ‘Juan was just killed’ would to many speakers have the same meaning as ‘Juan has just been killed’. This is because a similar process as the one I am to describe is occurring in American English, as Buescher (2004) notes. However, I decide to translate into Standard English.

the Preterit is more frequent among non-educated users, but this is certainly not the case for my Uruguayan informants (see 4.3.4.7). The Perfect seemed to be expanding, especially among non-educated speakers from rural parts of the country. Unfortunately, this is beyond the limited scope of this work, but it is an interesting possibility for further research, since descriptions of the phenomenon in the Uruguayan varieties lack.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Basic assumptions about change and the role of repetition and frequency

According to Bybee (2006:711), grammar is “[t]he cognitive organization of one’s experience with language”. General cognitive abilities are responsible for the way language develops, and necessarily also for the status quo of a language. Therefore, Bybee (e.g. 2001, 2007) and Bybee et al.’s (1994) theories are essentially about the human mind, not about pure language change. In this view, grammaticalization is the *creator* of structure. It should be noted that even though this view sees grammar as usage-based and output-driven, they still conceive of it as an abstract entity (as all other cognitive entities).

Grammaticalization theory (as discussed in further detail in 2.3) is in itself associated with cognitive/usage-based grammar (as opposed to generativism) since it does not draw a strict distinction between lexicon and syntax. This theory does indeed involve both, since its many steps involve semantic, functional and formal changes. Therefore, the generativist assumption of autonomous syntax (Chomsky 1967) is difficult to fit into grammaticalization theory. In addition, generativism sees language change as rule adjustments (Hopper and Traugott 2003:25, Van Gelderen 2004), and gives little attention to the steps in between, which is basically what grammaticalization is concerned with. The notion of layering (the coexistence of new and old grammaticalized forms that have the same function) is also difficult to explain using generative theory (Hopper and Traugott 2003). This is because these types of phenomena illustrate that grammar is not a static but a dynamic entity, in fact, what is assumed here is precisely this dynamic aspect; language is constantly shaped by external elements such as cognitive and pragmatic factors, and these have largely been ignored by structuralist approaches. Bybee et al. (1994:22) regard “system” or “structure” to be epiphenomenal rather than basic to the nature of grammatical substance and exponence”, and argue that a study of language structure should be abandoned in favour of a study of grammatical meaning and expression across languages. This is not consistent with a formal study of language, as the generativists advocate (as a matter of fact, they argue that *grammaticalization* is epiphenomenal, e.g. Faarlund 2007). All in all, the strict segregation between synchronic and diachronic layers postulated in generativism is inconsistent with the present approach.

Bybee (2003:7) argues that the “[r]emarkable similarity in grammaticization across unrelated languages strongly suggests that universals of diachronic development be included in a theory of language universals”. This statement reflects the necessity of taking a usage-based view on grammaticalization; as Hopper and Traugott (2003:75) point to, “a theory which regards semantic change as independent of morphosyntactic change provides no reasoned account for the extensive evidence that grammaticalization affects similar classes of lexical items in similar ways across a wide number of languages”. However, this use of the term *universal* calls for discussion. Bybee’s assumptions are made on the basis of statistics. There do exist exceptions, as I aim to show, and this has also been attested for American English (Buescher 2004). How can we legitimately call something a universal if it has exceptions? To understand Bybee’s use of the term universal, it is necessary to clarify the distinction between two different types of universals (Comrie 1981:19-20). According to Comrie, there are two types, *absolute* universals and *statistical* universals. The absolute universals are exceptionless (and few), and a typical example of this kind is ‘All spoken languages have vowels’. The statistical universals are not exceptionless. How can we then justify calling them universals? According to Comrie, a statistical universal is best looked at in a slightly different way, by defining it as a “[s]tatistically significant deviation from random distribution” (1981:19). For example, in a corpus consisting of synchronic descriptions and historical data of a sample of languages, the change resultative > perfect > simple past/perfective will stand out from random patterning, and if we use the above definition, it can be called a statistical universal.

Bybee (2003:7) actually goes as far as claiming that “[d]iachronic universals are much stronger than any synchronic universals we can formulate concerning the presence and meaning of tense and aspect markers in the languages of the world”. This claim is a continuation of Joseph Greenberg’s work (see e.g. 1969); all language states are products of usage, so it is the processes by which they change and the underlying cognitive driving forces for usage that are the real universals (also referred to as *typological universal grammar*, Heine 1997:6). However, if diachronic universals are the true universals, why do languages not look more like each other? Why do languages resemble each other to one extent, but vary more than one should expect if they were result of the same universals? According to Bybee (1997), this is for two reasons. First, languages resemble each other precisely because the mechanisms that lead to change are the same across languages. Secondly, these mechanisms do not give the exact same results because languages have differing linguistic material. I return to this in 2.4. As we shall see, there are constraints that determine the process, and these are precisely what make the end results of grammaticalization vary.

2.1.1 How does structure arise? The creative role of repetition

Bybee's view (e.g. 2007, Bybee and Hopper 2001) is consistent with what we know as *emergentism* (as opposed to *ontogenesis*). According to this view, language structure is a result of constant resystematization, so that structure is not static, but rather an ongoing, dynamic process (for application to phonology, see Bybee 2001). More specifically, we can say that certain substantive structures, when used repeatedly, create structure. Bybee (2001:8) labels this the "creative role of repetition". Thus, the mental representations of language are provisional, temporary states of affairs that are sensitive to and consistently adopting themselves to usage. Consequently, syntax and phonology have no autonomous existence beyond local storage and real time processing. They are not viewed as autonomous abstract entities. Therefore, in the present work, structure will be seen not as a holistic autonomous system but as something more fluid and shifting, that is, structures are taken to be unstable and manifested only stochastically. This is what is meant by *emergent* grammar; this process is understood as a process of *structuration*, a term originally borrowed from sociology (Giddens 1984). The term refers to structure as necessarily related to action; structure exists only "in so far as people behave in regular and fairly predictable ways" (Giddens 2001:668). (Note the similarities between this and the theory of *the invisible hand*, presented in 5.3.3). In this way, grammatical structure is assumed to arise through language use only, that is, action. Emergence is in this sense different from ontogenesis, the latter referring to the origins and development (in a way, the history) of an existent organism or system. The emergent structures, in contrast, are inherently unstable, and the fixing (structuration) of linguistic groups is therefore an ongoing process. This view on grammatical structure also implies that "mental representations are seen as provisional and temporary states of affairs that are sensitive, and constantly adapting themselves to usage" (Bybee and Hopper 2002:2).

The view of grammaticalization and language change as a whole assumed in the present work is therefore in accordance with the *usage-based* theories of language as presented in e.g. Langacker (1987) and Bybee (1985), in conceiving grammar "dynamically (...) constantly evolving, shaped and modified by language use" (Langacker 1987:57). Even though Bybee, whose theories I will use and elaborate in this chapter, essentially predict universal paths of language change, this is not inconsistent with Langacker's assumption that "[t]he path of language change cannot be predicted in absolute terms" (1987:51). Bybee does not pretend to predict *whether* a construction enters a path; she aims to predict *where* the path leads once the change has started. I will consider Bybee's more mechanistic explanation of

grammaticalization (that is, as an “emergent property of usage”, as Langacker puts it) as particularly useful, as will be discussed in 5.3.

The difference between procedural and declarative (or propositional) knowledge is also pivotal for our understanding of the present topic. According to Bybee (1998) there is a difference between declarative and procedural knowledge, the latter being the one that characterizes our knowledge of grammatical structure. Langacker (2002:15) also argues that “[a] speaker’s linguistic knowledge is procedural rather than declarative”. Declarative knowledge is factual knowledge people can report or describe. Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, is only manifested in people’s performance of skills, such as speaking a language or driving a car. The two types involve different memory processes, procedural knowledge being highly affected by repetition. However, with repetition, declarative knowledge can become procedural knowledge (as when learning a second language).

Procedural knowledge is affected by repetition in several ways. Units of procedure become larger with repetition, as recurring sequences of actions come to be represented as a single action, increasing fluency. This is both what we see when a construction increases in frequency (it fuses with the stem and is subject to phonetic reduction) and when doing non linguistic tasks, as driving a car. The accelerated planning and repetition is a result of what Bybee calls “the priming effect” (2007, 2001); it is easier to access words and phrases that have just been used (see 2.1.2). The production becomes more fluent; this is what we see in high frequency constructions like the one that will be treated in 2.5; when *habere* + PP increased in frequency, it also lost phonetic substance. Boyland (1998) describes a psychological process highly connected to procedural knowledge; *chunking* is the process that promotes the move from the stage where a complex structure is partially analyzable into steps or part, to the stage where the whole complex structure is resolidified into a unitary experience. This is highly applicable to the later stages of grammaticalization, for several reasons: the routinization and compacting of one or more elements that co-occur frequently in a functional context. In both contexts frequency is the key element; both because it links the complex sequence to the functional context, and because frequency of co-occurrence is necessary in becoming bonded to each other. In any case, high frequency makes the fluency occur faster; if you practise driving a lot, the elements involved for instance in making a turn will faster become a unified whole, and so on. All parts of the present thesis are evidence for language knowledge being procedural in nature, since the constructions in question show that verbal categories are strongly influenced by the increasing or decreasing frequency of single

items. In fact, as we shall see, we seem to be dealing with a case of frequency actually being the moderator of category structure.

Ultimately, it is worth noting that Langacker (2002:12) sees “grammar as image”, that is, he argues that grammar is imagic in character because it, like the lexicon, “provides for the structuring and symbolization of conceptual content”. Much like the lexicon, grammar conveys an imagery. This follows the assumption of no synonymy (Langacker 1987:39), because there is assumed to be a difference between phrases having the same truth value but different grammatical structures; they convey different imageries. For instance, passive sentences are assumed to convey different imageries than non-passive sentences. When using a particular grammatical construction or morpheme, we select a particular image to structure the situation, and since languages differ in structure, they necessarily differ in the imagery speakers employ. A crucial question is what impact these differences have on the way the speakers of different languages conceive the world. I agree with Langacker in that this relativistic view does not necessarily imply that differences in grammatical structure impose any constraints on thought, and thus that the impact of different imagery on thought is rather superficial.

2.1.2 Frequency effects

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, usage-based theory emphasizes frequency and the effects it has on structure. Frequency is assumed to be what determines which linguistic elements become entrenched. This follows from our view on linguistic knowledge as procedural; it is expected that frequency has a great effect on the representation and use of language, because of the impact repetition has on procedural knowledge. Much is known about frequency effects in language, and in what follows I outline their most important consequences.

2.1.2.1 Formal changes, reduction and preservation

Frequency has two very different effects on linguistic material; the *reduction* effect, which I turn to below, as well as the *preservation* effect. The latter points to the fact that words that have otherwise disappeared from a language may survive in very frequent constructions. This is precisely what we observe in the case of *habere* + PP; *habere* in its sense of possession has been replaced by another verb, *tener*, in Spanish, and only exists in this construction.

Fontanella de Weinberg (1987) describes the different stages of development of the literal use of the verb deriving from *habere* in Rioplatense, from being mildly frequent in the 18th century, to disappearing completely by the end of 19th century. Very frequent material is also resistant to analogical levelling; this is the reason why the most frequent verbs in a language tend to be irregular. They have great *lexical strength*; frequent exemplars have strong, easy accessible representations. The representations of the frequent constructions are made stronger because of *priming*; a linguistic item that has just been used (as frequent ones tend to be) is easier to retrieve, as mentioned previously, this is what is meant by the “priming effect” (Bybee 2001, 2007). Certain very frequent constructions are ritualized and readily available. They are more entrenched than less frequent material as a consequence of their continued repetition (Langacker 1987:100). This strength is the reason why items that have disappeared elsewhere survive in grammaticalized, high frequency contexts, as the verb *habere* has in *habere* + PP. This is related to so-called exemplar representation theory (Bybee 2006). Token frequency has an impact on exemplars because tokens of the same linguistic item map onto each other and strengthen the exemplar representation. Similar tokens (semantically, phonologically or pragmatically) are stored near similar exemplars in clusters or categories. The most frequent exemplar can be argued to be the most prototypical member (cf. 2.2.1.1 and 5.2.2.4), and such prototypicality can also shift towards the most frequent member (Bybee and Eddington 2006, Bybee 2007).

In addition, frequency leads to *formal reduction*. For instance, an item that has gone through grammaticalization (a process which implies increased frequency) is phonetically shorter at the end of the process than at the beginning of the process. Again, the fusing constituency structure is a result of high frequency of co-occurrence. The more often two elements appear together in a sequence the tighter their constituent structure will become. For example, when the Latin verb *habere* grammaticalized and became more frequent, it consequently underwent a reduction of phonetic shape; *habeo* > *he* (see 2.5.2 for details). Although some of the changes that lead to this affected the whole Latin phonological system, others were the direct result of frequency. Why is this? According to Bybee (2006:715), this is because “the articulatory representation of words and constructions is made up of neuromotor routines. When (...) repeated, their execution becomes more fluent”, which allows articulatory gestures to reduce and overlap. This is known as *the reducing effect*. Hopper and Traugott (2003:72) call this very same process *signal simplicity*, and claim that the reduction of form “typically results from the routinization (idiomatization) of expression”.

Bybee et al. (1994:20) list the following characteristics of grams⁶ and their phonological strength:

- 1) There is a link between frequency of use and phonetic bulk such that more frequently used material, whether grammatical or lexical, tends to be shorter (phonetically reduced) relative to less often used material.
- 2) Grams are phonetically reduced relative to generalized lexical items, which in turn are reduced relative to more specific items.

As a consequence, the most frequently used forms in a language are also among the shortest (Bybee et al. 1994:19), because high frequency words and phrases undergo phonetic reduction at a faster rate than low- and mid-frequency sequences (Bybee 2006:714). Not only does the specific item reduce; the whole construction may also fuse. That is, where there used to be a constituency boundary, this boundary disappears (Bybee and Hopper 2001:14). This is precisely what happened in the creation of the Romance future; *cantare habeo* was fused; *habeo* fused with the host, and eventually became *cantaré* (also with the aid of reduction processes). Interestingly, words that have the same internal structure (e.g. *family*, *memory*, *artillery*, *mammary*) reduce with different speed: the first two mentioned are highly frequent and lose syllabicity faster; the last two are not so frequent and reduce at a slower rate (Bybee 2007:270).

2.1.2.2 Semantic changes

These formal changes parallel the meaning changes that take place in the grammaticalization process. Phonetic reduction parallels semantic reduction/generalization, the fusion of the developing gram to surrounding lexical material is parallel to the functional change in which the gram becomes more dependent and its conceptual cohesion with lexical stems increases (Bybee et al. 1994:106). Bybee describes this as an iconic relation between meaning and form, and argues that an explanation of what triggers this iconicity is needed order to know more about the cognitive processes involved. This correlation is also referred to as *the co-variation hypothesis*. According to Bybee et al. (1994:20), there exists a “phonetic continuum that is directly parallel to the continuum for semantic reduction”. I now turn to the semantic changes involved in increased frequency, that is, *semantic reduction*.

⁶ *Gram* is used to refer to any grammatical morpheme or item (Bybee and Dahl 1989).

As a construction becomes more frequent, it loses semantic material and becomes more general. This process of reduction can be related to habituation (Bybee 2001:9); “the loss of impact due to repetition”. Bybee argues that this process is not restricted to language (ethnologists call this ritualization, and use it for other types of formal reduction as well, like gestures), but is the “decline in the tendency to respond to stimuli that have become familiar due to repeated or persistent exposure” (Haiman 1994:7).⁷ This is also observable in the way the emphatic becomes normal (the *pas* in French *ne pas* was originally emphatic), in the way swearing loses content etc.

Another effect is *emancipation*. This process is originally what happens when “an instrumental action is dissociated from its original motivation, and is free to take on a communicative function instead” (Bybee 2003:9). This process’ applicability to language is obvious; it can be observed in conventionalization, not to mention in grammaticalization, where words and constructions become dissociated from their original, lexical meanings. This is what we shall see happened to the verb *habere* in Late Latin. This will be discussed further as the question of pragmatic enrichment vs. semantic bleaching in grammaticalization in 2.3. *Habere* exemplifies both; it lost specific meaning components, but at the same time took on a functionally more applicable, grammatical meaning; pragmatic enrichment. Apart from this it has also underwent a common semantic change (not necessarily a frequency result); metaphorical extension. This is without doubt one of the most salient semantic changes in grammaticalization. It is, however, controversial to what extent metaphorical extension can be seen as triggering factor in grammaticalization. Whereas Heine et al. (1991) advocate such a view, Bybee et al. (1994) argue that metaphorical extension operates primarily on the lexical end of the grammaticalization cline (that is, the beginning), and that metaphorical extension is not the force that drives grams into more abstract domains. They argue that frequency is such a force, and in the following section I briefly discuss the question of its explanatory power.

2.1.2.3 Frequency: Cause or effect?

As we have seen, grammaticalization is tightly related to frequency; as a matter of fact, all the steps in the grammaticalization process are steps that follow frequency of use. Still, the inevitable question is whether frequency is a *cause* or an *effect*. Bybee (2007) addresses the problem of the explanatory power of frequency. She primarily focuses on the impact

⁷ As a curiosity, it should be noted that both Bybee (2003) and Haiman (1994) suggest that habituation may explain our decreased awareness of great art; perhaps this is why Monet’s lilies at some point start to seem trivial, or why we get tired of looking into Van Gogh’s eyes?

frequency has on language, and not on its possible explanatory power. So, “no matter the source of the frequency, the cognitive effects shape grammar” (2007:18). In my view, moving towards an explanation should be a goal of such studies, and Bybee also approaches an explanation for why certain constructions come to be frequent. According to her, it stems from different reasons. First of all, it has to do with what people want to talk about (which Bybee claims is “themselves”; one of the most frequent words in English is ‘I’), in other words, these are pragmatically and communicatively motivated factors. Second, and this is perhaps more relevant to the present topic, the way speakers tend to structure their discourse leads to the high frequency of certain elements. These patterns are eventually conventionalized into grammar through repetition, reduction and conventionalization. Third, there is a relationship between frequency and flexibility or generality of meaning. Items with a very general meaning tend to have a high frequency, as do polysemous words.⁸ This is exemplified in my data; the construction *viste* (discussed in chapter 5) has both a literal meaning (‘you saw’) and a pragmatic use (as actualizer). This is typical of verbs; they tend to be more semantically flexible than nouns. No matter the reason for the frequency, it has a strong impact on the mental representation of language. As Bybee (2007:16) correctly points out, “even a small number of repetitions on the speaker’s experience has a cognitive effect”. I return to the question of causation in chapter 5.

2.2 Definitions

In the following sections I define the relevant tenses and aspects with regards to the present case. The definitions are simplified to comply with the scope of the present work, and several controversies have been omitted. For further discussions, see Comrie (1976) and Frawley (1992). I will mainly use Bybee et al.’s (1994), Comrie’s (1976) and Frawley’s (1992) terminology when defining the perfect, past, imperfective, perfective and resultative. I will discuss the different functions of the perfect in greater detail in chapter 4. The definition of the perfect is necessarily more detailed, because of the difficulties concerning its definition. The definitions are based on the SER-system, presented in Reichenbach (1947). Dahl (1985) uses the so called SER-system to describe the temporal contours of verbal tenses, and expands Reichenbach’s system by also including a temporal frame notion.

⁸ Note that the view taken on semantics is that in which there is no strict segregation between semantics and pragmatics; “[s]emantic structure also comprises ‘pragmatic’ aspects of meaning (Taylor 2002:21).

The original claim is that there are at most three points in time to which are relevant to the choice of tense in any given sentence:

S – The point of speech

E – The point of the event

R – The point of reference

Consider the following Spanish example:

(1)

Juan se **había ido**

juan se hab-ía id-o

juan have-3SG.PLUPERF go-PAST.PART

‘Juan had gone away’

In (1), S is the time when (1) is uttered. E is the time when Juan went away, and R is some time-point between S and E that is provided by the context.

According to Dahl (1985), the SER-system works well with single, punctual actions, but is more difficult to fit with aspectual notions. Therefore, Dahl suggest an expansion of the system by including a forth element; the temporal frame, called F; the period within which the E-points are located. It is perhaps more common than the contrary to include an additional time frame in order to give an adequate account for the interpretation if a sentence. Consider the following sentence:

(2)

El año pasado el semestre **empezó** el veinte de marzo

el año pas-ado el semestre empez-ó el veinte de marzo

the year pass-PAST.PART the semester start-3SG.PRET the twenty of march

‘Last year (=F) the semester began on the 20th of March (=E)

The temporal frame notion is also necessary to account for the use of the perfect as opposed to the preterit. In English for example, the time frame is actually what determines whether the present perfect or the preterit are to be used.

Relevant in this respect is also the distinction between absolute and relative tense. In absolute tenses, the “reference point for the location of a situation in time is the present moment” (Comrie 1985:56). Relative tenses, on the other hand, denote that the reference point for location of a situation is given by the context, and not necessarily the present moment. The

past perfect is a good illustration of a combination of absolute and relative tense. The auxiliary provides the absolute tense, whereas the participle expresses the relative tense. This is because the participle per se only expresses time relative to another context-determined point of reference, whereas the auxiliary always has the present point as reference; it is deictic.

2.2.1 Perfect: Tense or aspect?

When studying the perfect in detail, it becomes clear that it does not fit into either the classical tense or aspect definition. We are therefore faced with two possibilities of definition, and I will discuss two opposing views; Comrie (1976) argues that the perfect is an aspect, whereas Bybee (1985) argues that it is a tense. What are the controversies based on?

Comrie (1976:1-2) defines tense as relating “the time of the situation referred to some other time, usually the moment of speaking”. In his definition of tense, he uses a very simple time line to illustrate our conception of time. It does not specify boundedness in any direction; we can of course not determine when the past starts or when the future ends. All tenses depart from the deictic centre; location at, before or after the deictic centre, and distance from the deictic centre. So, since tense locates the time of a situation relative to the situation of the utterance, we regard it as deictic. According to Comrie, aspect is very different from tense. Comrie defines aspects as “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation” (1976:3). So, aspect is not concerned with relating the time of the situation to any other time-point.

Comrie points out that a precise definition of tense and aspect is particularly important when it comes to the perfect. He defines the perfect as an aspect, even though he argues that it is doubtful whether the perfect really fits with his definition of aspect. This is because the perfect expresses a relation between two time-points, both the time of the state resulting from a prior situation, and the time at which this prior situation took place. That is, it does not deal with situation internal time, which is Comrie’s main defining property of an aspect. In this sense, the perfect “partakes of both the present and the past” (1976:52). Cross-linguistically, this duality has interesting manifestations. What does the combination of the two characteristics of the perfect (the present and the past) result in? Languages differ, but they typically combine a verb in the present tense with a temporal marker that denotes ‘prior time’. In Romance, it is the past participle which expresses this posteriority. In the case that I will

turn to in chapter 5, of an adverb meaning ‘already’ becoming a perfect marker, it is this element that expresses the relevance in the present, since the verb in these cases is in the past tense.

So, the fact that the function of the perfect is to relate a state to some prior event, and not to describe the internal contours of an event, makes it difficult to fit with the definition of an aspect. However, according to Comrie the perfect is not just a tense either, since it “differs in meaning from the various tense forms” (1976:6). So, Comrie accepts the fact that the perfect is not a typical aspect, but still chooses to treat it as one.

Bybee (1985) emphasizes the main characteristic feature of the perfect as being one of *current relevance*. She also argues that this sense is not relevant to the internal temporal contours of the situation, which is the typical definition of an aspect (cf. the previous paragraph). Therefore she argues that perfect is a tense, because its “meaning deals with the time of an event or situation relevant to another time, usually the moment of speech” (Bybee 1985:160). This definition is consistent with Comrie’s (1976:1-2) definition of tense. Still, according to Bybee, there is one argument that calls for regarding perfect as an aspect: it cross-classifies with the present and past tense, that is, in some languages the perfect may exist in both present or past (as in Spanish or English). On the other hand, perfect does not occur in languages that do not have other tense distinctions marked inflectionally⁹. This is an indication of the possible relation between perfect and the other tenses. Yet another criterion for regarding perfect as a tense is whether its formal marking is parallel to the marking of other tenses. According to Bybee, the data from her sample of languages were ambiguous. She concludes that the evidence suggested it can not be regarded as part of a general tense system, but it is not always mutually exclusive with other members of the category.

Even though there are obvious problems with the definition, I will follow Bybee in defining the perfect as a tense. Having said this, I will not put too much emphasis on the definition, but rather on the characteristics of the perfect category. Still, it is interesting to note that we are dealing with a verbal category that is so idiosyncratic that it does not fit with either one of the definitions.

⁹ Fulfulde has anterior, but does not have tense (Theil, personal communication). However, this understanding of anterior is somehow different from Bybee’s, because the Fulfulde anterior does not express current relevance, but rather relevant time. Bybee’s use of the term is as a synonym to perfect, and I stick to this definition.

2.2.1.1 Perfect

The perfect denotes a situation which is temporally preceding a reference point and which has relevance at the reference point. As discussed above, Comrie (1976) and Bybee (1985) agree that there is one property that all the meanings of the perfect have in common; that of current relevance. This can be regarded as the proto meaning. The different functions of the perfect; resultative, experiential, current relevance, persistent situations and recent past, all share this property (cf. figure 1). I discuss these functions in further detail in chapter 4.

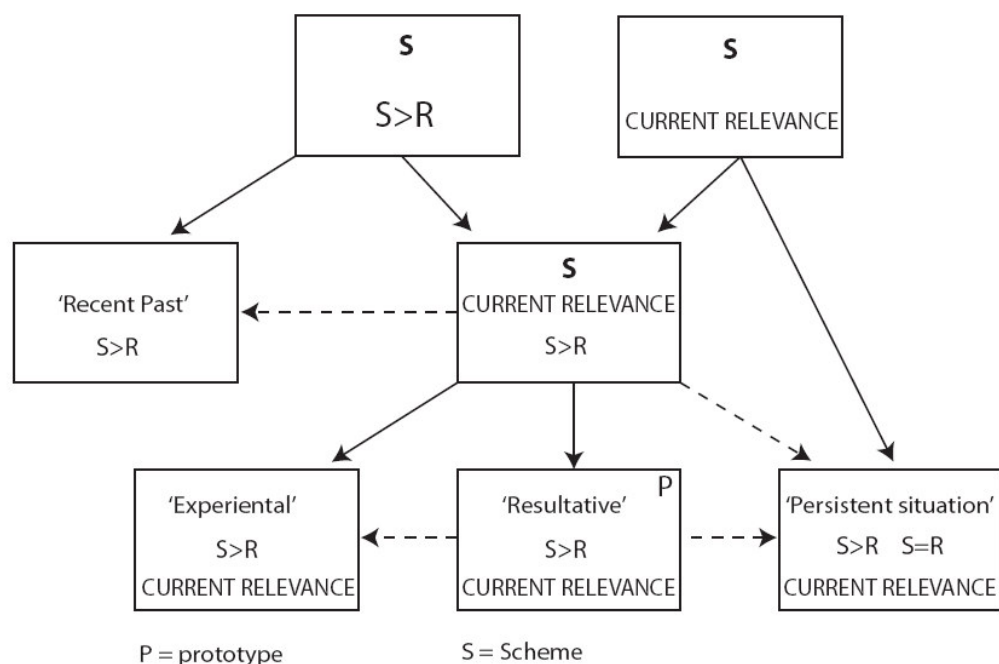
Before continuing, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by proto meaning. The discussion on categorization, both of nominal and grammatical categories, is vast. Generalizing, we can say that the reductionist, strict criterial-attribute model (in which class membership is a predictable all/nothing affair) has shown only to be applicable to a limited range of speech behaviour. In addition, categorization has a particularly prominent position in cognitive theory, in which it is invoked in several functions not usually associated with it (Langacker 1987:369, Bybee 2001). What is assumed in the present work is an extension of the prototype theory, as presented in Langacker (1987). The prototype theory was an elaboration of Wittgenstein's famous investigation of the game category (1953), where he concluded that members of categories form chains of family resemblances, and all that is necessary to be a member of the category is that each member shares one attribute with another member. In this way, not all members of the category need to share one certain feature, but they must all be connected, if only indirectly. We do not categorize (linguistically or non-linguistically) by discrete assignments to categories based on the presence or absence of features, but by comparison of features shared with a central member (Bybee 2001:3, Langacker 2002:3). Rosch's (e.g. 1975) elaboration of the prototype theory postulates that each category has a prototype, which has a cluster of attributes characteristic of the category. This way a category can consist of both prototypical members, and more marginal members. Note also that the perceived centre of a category can shift towards the most frequent member (Bybee 2001:3).

Langacker (1987:371) presents a unified version¹⁰ of the prototype theory and a model based on *schematicity*. He points out that while a prototype is a typical instance of a category, a schema is "an abstract categorization that is fully compatible with all the members of the category it defines (...) it is an integrated structure that embodies the commonality of its

¹⁰ According to Langacker (1987:370) such a version accounts for "lexical (and other) categories", I interpret this to also include grammatical categories, so that categorization also accounts for the more formal issues in language.

members”. This combination of prototype in the more classical Aristotelian sense and schemas was original. The different meanings of the category are elaborations of the schema in contrasting ways, that is, more specific and detailed meanings than the abstract categorization they all have in common. The two may seem different, but he argues convincingly that a synthesis of the prototype view and the schematic view is possible, and that they are inherently related and aspects of a unified phenomenon. Whether by schema or prototype, categorization lies in a comparison event with the form $S > T = V$. By this is meant that within the target (T) it must be observed a configuration that satisfies some or all of the specifications of the standard (S). The magnitude of discrepancy between the target and the standard has to be below a certain degree of tolerance for the element to fit into the category. When $V = 0$ (all the specifications of S are met by T), S is a schema, and the relationship between $S \rightarrow T$ is one of elaboration and specialization. In the case of inconsistency between S and T, and V does not equal zero, S is referred to as the prototype, because the relationship $S \rightarrow T$ involves extension rather than simple elaboration. The two types are compatible because the gradation of values for V is possible; it can be seen as a scale where schematicity ($V=0$) occupies one endpoint. I return to the notion of schematicity in 2.5.3, since it is also used to illustrate the relationship between grammatical and lexical words.

Figure 1. Categorization of the perfect based on schematicity and prototypes after Langacker (1987)



So, we have seen that the proto meaning of the perfect is that of current relevance. When we use Langacker's elaboration, we would have to define it slightly differently, as shown above;

in this view, the prototype (not the schematic meaning) is the resultative, which is a concrete instantiation of the category, whereas the ‘abstract categorization’, as mentioned above, that all members of the category have in common is that of ‘current relevance’.

Nevertheless, it is worth discussing whether current relevance really is a good way of characterizing the perfect category. When we study its typical meanings in detail, we find that they differ quite a lot. However, this is hardly surprising. As Langacker (1987:369) notes, elements that are linked together in categories can be “distinct and sometimes quite disparate”. The two functions of the perfect that are most similar to the prototype (that is, V has a very low value) are the *resultative* and the *experiential*. However, though the experiential does indeed denote current relevance, this relevance is very different from that of the resultative. As to the resultative, the relevance is concrete. The experiential is not so concrete. Here, the past action is relevant to the moment of speech in a more abstract way; for instance, it is typically used in phrases like *Fui a Gualeguaychú*, ‘I have been to Gualeguaychú’, but even though this is relevant for the speaker at the current moment, it has an abstract relevance. In more prototypical uses of current relevance, the past action has a concrete relevance for the moment of speech, as in *I have eaten, so I’m not hungry anymore*. Here, the present state (*not hungry*) is a concrete result of the past action (*have eaten*). In the experiential function, the relevance is abstract because it is not ‘observable’ to the same extent.

The function called *persistent situation* is also very different from the other, first of all because it does not denote a situation that has finished, but rather a situation that is ongoing at the present moment. So, even though the current relevance is obviously present, this is not a ‘past action’. The function we call *recent past* is altogether different from the above. This is because its current relevance is not evident as in the other functions mentioned above. The recent past expresses temporal recentness in the past. My data include several examples of this, as in (3):

(3) Informant nr. 1 (uttering the following while still talking)

Viste como **hablé** ahora hablá vos
v-iste como habl-é ahora hablá vos
see-2.SG.PRET how talk-1.SG.PRET now talk you
‘Have you noticed how much I’ve talked, now you talk’

In this example, the only relation between the two situations is one of temporal closeness. However, Anderson (1982:227) points out that “[i]f two particular meanings are often expressed by the same surface form (across a random sample of languages), we can assume that the two meanings are ‘similar’ to the human mind”. We can follow Anderson in that there must be some probable reason why the recent past is expressed through the perfect (some cognitive reason), so even though the relevance of the recent past is not evident, we may assume it to be its recentness. Perhaps the temporal nearness is conceived as relevance in the current situation, so that if an action has taken place very recently, this action seems to us as relevant. Intuitively this seems plausible, judging from what we know about the world.

As a whole, the unification of the schematic and the prototype views on categorization seems to fit well with the perfect category. On the abstract level, current relevance is characteristic, and on the concrete level, the resultative is what most resembles the prototype, since the relationship between the prototype and the target (T) never equals zero, but always implies some additional features.

In the present work the term ‘perfect’ is used to refer to the present perfect. It should be noted, however, that besides the present, the perfect may occur with future and past markers. These tenses are combined absolute/relative tenses. In the past perfect, for instance, the auxiliary provides the absolute tense (its reference point is the present moment), whereas the participle has a relative temporal value; it places an action prior to a context-defined time. The past perfect can be schematized as follows: $E > R > S$. Apart from denoting different temporal contours, the past perfect and the present perfect also differ in semantic content. The notion of current relevance is not as important to the past perfect as it is to the present perfect; in fact, its semantics define above all an action as preceding another action in the past; it expresses past in the past. It places an action in time relative to another action; it does not primarily add relevance, as its present counterpart does. It lacks the component “relevance for R”. Interestingly, the past perfect occurs frequently in my data. It seems as if it is alive to a greater extent than the present perfect. As we shall see, this is consistent with the possible explanation for the phenomenon in question.

2.2.1.2 Past

According to Frawley (1992:352), the past in a vectorial system¹¹, is an “undifferentiated temporal extent moving away from the present moment into the already known or completed, and, with enough temporal removal, into the unknown and hypothetical”. Frawley also points out that the past is mostly associated with bounded events, and claims that this stems from the fact that the past actions are viewed from the present, and therefore are conceived as a totality. According to him, the past is also associated with distal events.¹²

Comrie (1985:41) emphasizes that “the meaning of the past tense is thus locating in time present to the present moment, and any further deductions about temporal location (...) are result of other factors than simply tense”. For example, the past tense only locates the action as prior to the present moment, and does not say anything about whether the action occupied a single or an extended time prior to the present moment. In order to express this, an aspect is used, e.g. the imperfective. Nor does it say anything about the relationship between the action and the present or future (as the perfect does). According to Comrie (1985:41-42) it is often a conversational implicature that makes us *not* conceive the action as continuing into the present or the future. This follows from Grice’s Maxim of Relevance (1975); other things being equal, statements about the present moment are more relevant than those about other times. Therefore, explicitly locating a situation in the past indicates that the situation does not hold for the present. If it did, the present would be used. Note the difference between this and the perfect; the latter typically expresses the fact that a situation has occurred in the past *and* is currently relevant.

Bybee (1985:155) notes that some languages have a distinction between a remote past and a recent past. However, interestingly, when further examined, the recent pasts showed to be having a perfect function, not a past function. This is consistent with the discussion about the perfect in the previous paragraph; the recent past is so recent that it is conceived as having current relevance, and is therefore expressed using the perfect.

¹¹ By vectorial it is here meant the way time is expressed in languages that do not differentiate along the time line, that is, simply extend it in each direction away from the present moment, creating a tripartite system; past, present and future.

¹² This dissociative function of the past is often reflected in the fact that it is commonly used to mark social distance, as in ‘I want to talk to you’ vs. ‘I would like to talk to you’.

2.2.1.3 Further definitions

Imperfective: is an aspect. The situation is viewed as unbounded in the sense that it is habitual, continuous, progressive or iterative. When the distinction between perfect and preterit disappears in a language, it is the existence of an imperfective that determines whether it becomes a perfective or a simple past; if the imperfective exists, it becomes a perfective.

Perfective: is an aspect that conveys that a situation is viewed as bounded temporarily. Most relevant for the present case is that as a result of the disappearing distinction between perfect and preterit in Rioplatense, what remains will be a perfective, because an imperfective already exists. In German, on the other hand, the same change (in this case the Preterit being the disappearing category) leads to the remaining form being a *simple past*, because of the lack of an imperfective in the language.

Resultative: conveys that a situation is the result of a past action. It denotes that the action persists into the present.

2.3 Grammaticalization: General

Grammaticalization¹³ involves the change of a *content* word into a *function* word, and is the process by which a lexical item becomes more grammatical, or as Hopper and Traugott (2003:2) put it, “[t]he *steps* whereby *particular items* become more grammatical *through time*” (my italics). This definition points to several important characteristics of grammaticalization. The first is that this change is not abrupt, and therefore can be seen as a cline (Hopper and Traugott 2003:6) (or as *steps*, as in the definition above). The second is that the study of grammaticalization involves both a *diachronic* and a *synchronic* dimension of language development (cf. *through time*), since it concerns an item’s original meaning and the way it has developed (the diachronic dimension) as well as the way it is used at a particular time (the synchronic dimension). The notion of *particular items*, however, needs some commenting. Bybee (2002:602-603) defines grammaticalization as the process whereby a particular *construction*, not item, becomes increasingly grammatical. For example, as we shall see in 2.5, the Latin verb *habere* (indeed an item) gave rise to two different target meanings,

¹³ Though Bybee and Bybee et al. consequently use the term *grammaticization* I prefer *grammaticalization*, without this choice having any theoretical implications whatsoever.

that is, perfect and future. This illustrates that it is the construction that grammaticalizes, not the particular item. However, all items in a particular construction need not grammaticalize (for example, *I am going to see the King* is grammaticalized, but *I am travelling to see the King*, which is an instance of the same construction, is not). Therefore a good definition may be that “a construction with particular lexical items in it becomes grammaticized” (Bybee 2002:602), instead of saying that a lexical item does. Heine et al. (1991) elaborate the idea that there are different types of entities going into grammaticalization. They argue that, on the one hand, there are the source concepts (e.g. concrete objects, locations, that is, simple concepts). On the other hand, we have what they call source propositions; which are stereotyped concepts basic to human communications and experience¹⁴. These propositions typically involve two participants, and instances of this type grammaticalizing are what we would rather call constructions, like Latin *habere* + PP.

In the present work I primarily refer to Bybee’s (1985, 1994) theories. On this view, grammaticalization (that is, the use that leads to grammaticalization) is the main creator of grammatical structure. In fact, as Heine (1997:6) points to, grammatical constructions do not arise ex nihilo; rather they “can be traced back to semantically concrete source concepts”.

A characteristic of grammaticalization subject to vigorous debate is that of *unidirectionality* (Hopper and Traugott 2003:99-139, Haspelmath 1999). This notion refers to the fact that a lexical item can adopt grammatical meaning, but a grammatical item cannot adopt lexical meaning. In detail, we mean that the change only happens in one direction along a cline, as exemplified in (1) and (2):

a) The grammaticalization cline (detailed)

content item → grammatical word → clitic → inflectional affix

More generally, the cline can be described as follows:

b) The grammaticalization cline (schematic)

lexical items used in specific contexts → syntax → morphology

¹⁴ Heine (1993:31) compares the propositions with Langacker’s event schemas; but stress that what distinguishes the two is that event schemas are composed of more than one perceptually discontinuous entity.

There do exist counterexamples (see e.g. Faarlund 2007). Since we are aware of the existence of these rare counterexamples, it is perhaps fruitful to see unidirectionality as an empirical claim about a very strong tendency, parallel to the way we view statistical universals (as discussed in 2.1). It is however possible to view the unidirectionality as a biproduct of general properties of linguistic change (see Faarlund 2007 for discussion).¹⁵ Still, I will consider this an important characteristic of grammaticalization, even though I am aware that there do exist counterexamples (cf. Janda 2001). I will leave the discussion of such examples aside. Most important is the fact that unidirectionality is systematic and cross-linguistically replicated (Hopper and Traugott 2003:99), and that the counterexamples are sporadic. So, interestingly, unidirectionality is salient in grammaticalization, but an opposite process, narrowing, is common in general semantic change involving content items (Wilson 2003). This is what happens when an item is used to convey a more specific sense than the encoded one (as when ‘drink’ is used to refer to ‘drink alcoholic beverages’ etc.).

Another semantic change involved in grammaticalization is, according to Bybee et al. (1994) so-called *semantic bleaching* (as discussed in 2.1.2.2). It can however be discussed whether bleaching really is the appropriate term. This is because while the loss of specific semantic components is evident, the gained functional applicability may be understood as pragmatic enrichment.¹⁶ The constructions lose certain properties, but gain others. Some argue (e.g. Fischer 2007) that the types involving pragmatic enrichment are in fact different types of grammaticalization (e.g. Sweetser 1990). I will not emphasize this possible controversy. All grammaticalized constructions become more general and get a wider usage scope; this in itself can be labelled pragmatic enrichment. Therefore I can not see how one excludes the other; the process may well involve *both* loss of specific meaning components *and* pragmatic enrichment. In fact this is what we see in the case of *habere*; it takes on a more abstract (in the sense of less specific) meaning, but at the same time gets a broader usage scope; pragmatic enrichment. The same holds for the *viste*-construction which I turn to in 5.2.2.

¹⁵ And note the interesting controversy that formalists argue the exact opposite, namely that the unidirectionality associated with grammaticalization is epiphenomenal (Fischer 2007:329).

¹⁶ Note that in the present work *pragmatic enrichment* refers to the broadening of functional applicability, that is, the ability to be used in a larger set of contexts (Hopper and Traugott 2003:94). This is typical of grammaticalizing constructions. Within Relevance Theoretic framework, on the other hand, the term ‘pragmatic enrichment’ is used to refer to the process whereby linguistically-encoded meaning (which, on this view, is taken to underdetermine the proposition expressed by an utterance) is enriched in context to express a full proposition (i.e. an *explicature*) (see e.g. Carston 2002).

2.4 The Theory of Paths: General

A central question to grammaticalization is, as Hopper and Traugott (2003:101) put it, “[w]hether there are constraints on what meanings are subject to grammaticalization and on how the meanings of lexical items that become grammatical may change”. Bybee et al.’s *Theory of paths* (1994) addresses these two questions. They view language as composed of phonetic and semantic substance. The goal of their work is “[t]he study of the substance of linguistic elements and the processes of change that mold these elements” (1994:2). Backus (2004:179) argues that “we still need something that links what speakers do in conversation with what happens to the language as a result of it”, and the theory of Bybee et al. is an attempt in this direction. The theory focuses on the morphemes associated with verbs and how they got to become such grammatical entities. It is both semantic and formal in nature since it aims to identify correspondences between the meanings of grammatical morphemes (the semantic part) and the expression they tend to take (the formal part). Bybee (1985:7) states that “linguistic expression is not entirely arbitrary; rather there is a strong correspondence between the content of a linguistic unit and the mode of expression it takes”. On such a view, the development of new forms of expression is motivated by semantic and cognitive factors; these provide the link between the source meaning and the target meaning. This is true of non-grammaticalization motivated changes (Sweetser 1990), but also holds for semantic changes that lead to important functional changes, as we observe in grammaticalization. These cognitive structures make grammar look the way it does, so this is where we have to look to find the reasons for the regularities observed. Therefore, the paths of development are universal: they are universal because the way we use language is universal. The paths are driven by metaphor, inference, generalization, harmony and absorption of contextual meaning (Bybee et al. 1994:282); all of which are general factors involved in language use. This is what leads Bybee et al. to the conclusion that the processes underlying change “[m]ust be carefully examined, as they are the true universals of language”. If use leads to change and change creates structure, then the mechanisms by which a change is induced must be the desired object of study. Through the paths of development, we can make predictions about the changes induced by use.

The theory is usage-based and more semantic than structural because it sees the semantics of the items as the point of departure, not the category. This way, it does not study the different tenses, aspects and moods from a structural point of view but rather how the semantic substance of these domains is molded into grammatical meaning; i.e. diachronically. The

predictions are based on statistics taken from data from 76 languages in 25 different phyla. The main hypotheses are:

- 1) There are universal paths of development triggered by universal causes of grammaticalization
- 2) Movement along these paths happen in one direction only
- 3) Form and meaning co-vary; increased grammaticalization of meaning is accompanied by increased grammaticalization of form

As briefly mentioned, the work of Bybee and Bybee et al. (e.g. 1994) can be seen as an elaboration of Joseph H. Greenberg's work (Greenberg 1969). Greenberg's theory, known as *diachronic typology*, basically postulates that "[t]ypological patterns are shown to emerge from common diachronic changes that arise in related and unrelated languages." (Bybee 2006:1). Bybee et al.'s work follows Greenberg's in three ways; it is cross-linguistic; it focuses on semantic substance and phonological substance of the expressions of grammatical categories, and it includes a diachronic perspective. The latter is essential for my approach as well: including the diachronic dimension in morphological or morphosyntactic studies does, as we shall see, increase the explanatory power. When it comes to my specific object of study, omitting the diachronic dimension and only looking at the synchronic layer would actually mislead us. Bybee (2003:1) puts it this way: "[A]ny synchronic pattern must have a diachronic dimension, since that pattern had to come into being in some way".

The diachronic approach, then, has various advantages (Bybee et al. 1994):

1. Increasing explanatory power. Showing that a certain form has a certain function isn't worth much; it must also be proved how it came to have that function.
2. A diachronic description reveals cognitive and communicate factors. Variable situations are better suited for revealing this than static situations.
3. Similarities between languages are more easily spotted in a diachronic perspective, that is, in terms of theories of paths, diachronic descriptions of the predictable development of grams.

A diachronic approach is particularly useful when it comes to revealing the "age" of the form in question; its so-called *perfade*. For example, there is a striking correlation between which meanings tend to have periphrastic and which tend to have synthetic expression. Bybee et al.

propose that the explanation for this correlation lies in the ways these grams develop over time; they develop out of grammatical material and their generalization in meaning is parallel to their reduction in form and fusion with the host (cf. the co-variation hypothesis in 2.1.2.2). Therefore we can make predictions about the form a typical category may take. For example, perfect and progressive are younger, they are therefore less grammaticalized, less generalized, less fused with the head and less short than older grams (as simple pasts or perfectives). This is pivotal for the present work; such predictions do not always hold true. If one were to study Rioplatense on a synchronic level in the future, the erroneous conclusion that the perfective (which the preterit would then have become) was the result of synthesised perfect would probably be drawn.

All in all, Bybee et al. (1994:281) argue that their findings suggest that “grammatical meaning is constituted from a set of diachronically related uses with meanings that are contextually determined to a large extent”. If we assume usage to be fairly similar across the world (which is normally done), the implications are necessarily universal.

Nevertheless, despite this cross-linguistic scope attested to grammaticalization, there are typological constraints as to where along the paths a grammaticalizing construction is taken. Even though languages with different typology all exhibit out grammaticalization, they do so to different extents. Bybee (1997) argues that if grammaticalization involves the parallel development of meaning and form, then languages that grammaticalize form to a lesser extent (i.e. analytic languages, which do not have inflectional or obligatory morphology) must be assumed to also grammaticalize meaning to a lesser extent. The typological constraints make languages look different; the linguistic material constrains where the process is taken. With respect to the perfective path (see 2.4.1), an analytic language can be expected to have perfect, which has a low *perfade*, and consequently is normally expressed periphrastically, but will probably not have a simple past/perfective, which are more grammaticalized and usually synthesized.

2.4.1 Source meanings and unidirectionality

Which meanings serve as sources for grammaticalization?¹⁷ According to Bybee et al. (1994:9), “the actual meaning of the construction that enters into grammaticalization uniquely determines the path that the grammaticization follows and, consequently, the resulting

¹⁷ For a detailed account of source meanings of auxiliaries, see Heine (1993).

grammatical meanings”. Certain source meanings lead to certain grammatical categories¹⁸. Heine et al. (1991:32) state that “[t]here is a limited number of basic cognitive structures (...) that make up the source of or input to grammaticalization”. Bybee et al. do not assume that one source meaning can lead to different grammatical categories. It might seem that the same source gives rise to different categories, but this is because the grams are at different stages on the same developmental path. For example, the source meaning ‘resultative’ may be at a state where it denotes anteriority (as in Standard Spanish) or simple past (as in German). Bybee et al. (1994:12) actually go as far as stating that “the source meaning uniquely determines the grammaticization path that the gram will travel in its semantic development”. In addition, we do not assume that it is the specific item that enters grammaticalization; we assume that it is the *construction*. We can assume this on the basis of items like *habere*. This verb both occurred in the construction that became the future marker in Romance, and also in the mentioned construction that became the perfect.

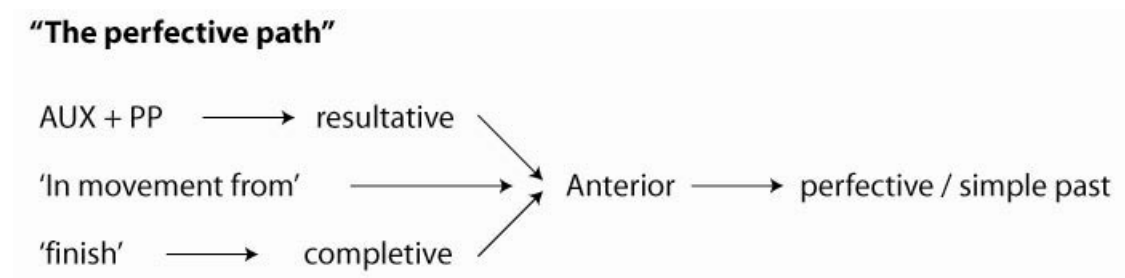
This unidirectionality is not to be confused with the unidirectionality described in 2.3. This type comes in addition to the unidirectionality of semantic change; this is a more specific unidirectionality in the grammatical and phonological change that accompanies grammaticalization (Bybee et al. 1994:13).

The question that arises is *why* certain source meanings serve as sources for grammaticalization. They seem to have at least two characteristics in common; they are general in their semantics, and they are frequent. For instance, ‘go’ may serve as a source, but we can be pretty sure ‘stroll’ never will. The latter provides too much detail about the nature of the movement, and is not applicable to all subjects. Givón (1995:25) suggests that the selection of source meanings may have to do with what he labels cognitive markedness; marked structures are harder to process, that is, to memorize and retrieve, and therefore perhaps less eligible as source meanings. As usual, the frequency ‘explanation’ presents us with the question of causality; in this case, the fact that source meanings are frequent may be because they are general (general concepts are usually frequent), but it may well be that general concepts are used as source meanings *because* they are frequent. We don’t know; we do know that frequency is a prerequisite, but not in itself enough, since most frequent concepts never grammaticalize.

¹⁸ For a critical view on the “auxiliation constraint”, see Detges (2004), in which he argues that functional categories *can* derive from very different lexical sources.

Movement along the paths follow the same mechanisms as discussed above; the general cognitive abilities that are reflected in language use govern both which forms go into grammaticalization, and what paths these forms later choose. Bybee et al. (1994) identify three major paths of development; the perfect path, the imperfective path and the future path. Here I present them schematically. The left indicates source meaning.

Figure 2. Perfective path



Bybee et al. (1994:86) state that “[t]he change of an anterior to past or perfective is typical for grammaticization changes”, and that “an actual diachronic relation can be demonstrated between pairs of grams: a perfect tends to develop into a past or perfect as in Romance languages” (Bybee and Dahl 1989:56). These predictions do not hold for the development in Rioplatense. However, as I will soon turn to, the other paths predicted (see figure 3 and 4 below) are indeed exemplified in Spanish, including Rioplatense.

Figure 3. Future path

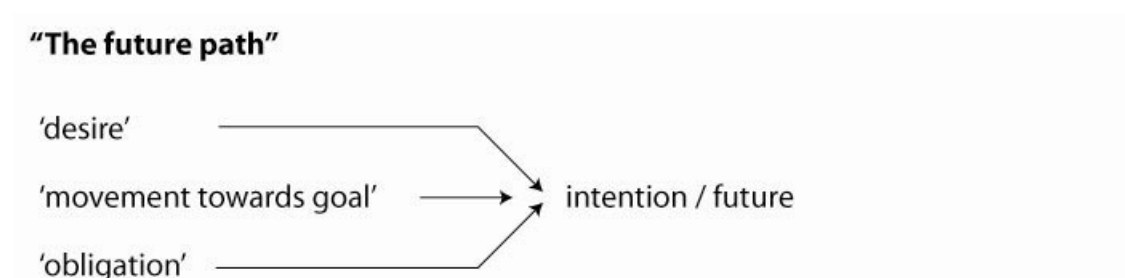
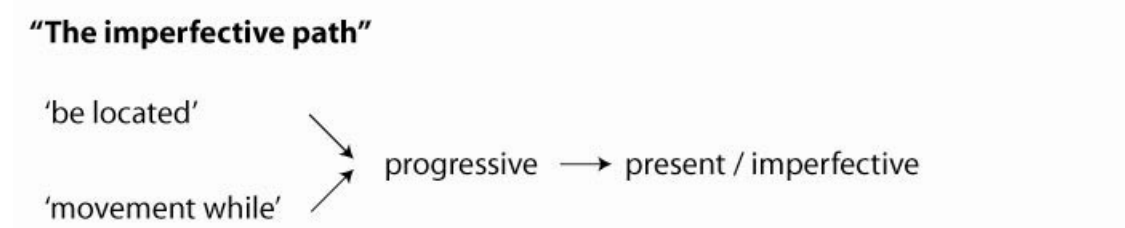


Figure 4. Imperfective path



Interestingly, Rioplatense Spanish (and Standard Spanish) has followed both “The future path” and “The imperfective path” exactly as predicted. The Spanish progressive is expressed through the verb *estar*, which originally (and in other contexts) means ‘to be located’, as in (14):

(14)

Estoy cantando

estoy cant-ando

be 1SG.PRES.IND sing-PRES.PART

‘I am singing’

The development of the future is an even better example, since it exemplifies the development of two of the source meanings mentioned, ‘movement towards goal’ and ‘obligation’. In Spanish today there exists an old, morphological future. This is the result of the grammaticalization of the following construction:

(15)

Cantare habeo

cantare habeo

sing INF must 1SG.PRES.IND

‘I have to sing’

Notice that this is the same verb as in the construction that led to the formation of the perfect category. This exemplifies what I stated in 1.1; it is not the single item that goes into grammaticalization, it is the construction. Here, the same item has appeared in two different constructions, from which two different tenses have evolved; future and perfect (Heine 1993:30). The construction underwent grammaticalization and consequently (see 2.1.2.2 for the co-variation hypothesis) phonological reduction and looks like this today:

(16)

Cantaré

cantar-é

sing-1SG.FUT

‘I will sing’

However, today this form is being replaced by a periphrastic future, and the original meaning of the verb being grammaticalized (*ir*) is that of ‘movement towards goal’:

(17)

Voy a cantar

voy a cantar

go 1SG.PRES.IND to sing INF

‘I will sing’

Strangely, the perfective path does not fit: the source meaning is the resultative, and its semantic development has gone as expected up to a point (the point where it functions as perfect) where it suddenly halted. It has not continued its development into perfective. It seems as if the source meaning in this case has not determined the path of the gram, as posited by Bybee et al. (1994). I discuss this in further detail in chapter 5.

2.5 The grammaticalization of the Latin *habere* + past participle construction

The development of the Romance Perfect is a good illustration both of the creative role of repetition and of the frequency effects such as erosion and reduction, as well as of loss of specific meaning components and gained pragmatic strength. Its development is highly relevant for the present topic because it illustrates that the process from Romance to Spanish seems to have followed the predicted development (that is, followed the perfective path, as sketched above) up to a hundred years ago. This indicates that we are dealing with a sudden halt in an otherwise predictable grammaticalization process.

2.5.1 Origins and development

One important aspectual innovation of Latin was the introduction of a periphrastic tense that unambiguously denoted *perfect* (Penny 2002:165). This construction exists in the Romance languages today. In French and most dialects of Italian and Romanian it has, as expected, generalized to perfective. In most dialects of Spanish it still has perfect meaning and contrasts with the preterit, but the perfect is gaining terrain just as in other Romance languages (Bybee et al. 1994:85, Comrie 1976:53). Therefore, the outcome of the process that started in Latin is

exactly as predicted by the perfective path; in certain varieties, the resultative has generalized to perfective, whereas in others, it is at different stages in the parallel development.

Originally, Latin had only a synthetic preterit; *cantavi*. This form could be used both to denote past actions *with and without current relevance*, that is, it also conveyed perfect meaning (Comrie 1976:53). Latin had a content verb called *habere* that had the lexical meaning of possession; “to have, to own”. Originally, *habere* was typically used in possessive phrases:

(18)

Cultellum habeo

cultellu-m habe-o

knife-ACC have-1SG.PRES.IND

‘I have a knife’

However, there existed a construction consisting of *habere* + past participle (PP) which was used in phrases with resultative meaning, as the following:

(19)

Habeo cultellum comparatum

habe-o cultellu-m compar-atum

have 1SG.PRES.IND knife ACC bought PART.ACC.

‘I have the knife which is bought’

In (2), the participle, *comparatum*, appears in the accusative case to concord with the noun *cultellum*; there was agreement between participle and object. There also existed a parallel construction that was used with the intransitive verbs, and that used *esse* (‘be’) instead of *habere*. Remains of this construction still exist in French and Italian (though not in Spanish), but their use is not determined by intransitivity, rather by unaccusativity;

(20)

Elle est allée à l’école

elle est all-é-e á l’école

she be 3SG.PRES.IND go-PAST.PART-FEM to the school

‘She has gone/went to school’

(21)

Lei é andata alla scuola

lei é and-at-a alla scuola

she be 3SG.PRES.INF go-PAST.PART-FEM to the school

‘She has gone/went to school’

Notice also how both participles agree in gender with the subject. In the French example, however, the agreement is only reflected orthographically (though this is not always the case). I now return to the *habere* + PP construction. This construction could be regarded as resultative because it originally denoted a state that was brought about by some action in the past (Bybee et al. 1994:63). This sense is similar to the perfect but different for the following reason: the perfect indicates that the past action has relevance in the present. But where the perfect has current relevance, the resultative consistently signals that the state persists at the reference time. For example, (22) is possible, but (23) is not:

(22) He has gone and come back already

(23) *He is gone and come back already

This is precisely because the resultative points to the state resulting from the action, but the perfect points to the action itself. We can be quite sure that the constructions that now have perfect, perfective or simple past meanings in for example Romance and Germanic did arise from a resultative construction, since there do exist good written sources. Bybee et al. (1994:63) point to the fact that the resultative may be lexically restricted, that is, that the same construction does not always have a resultative meaning. This was true of Latin. For example, early in its development, it seems that the resultative construction was used exclusively with typical change of state verbs as *persuade*, *learn* and *discover*. Its grammaticalization can be observed as the construction generalizes to also include other types of dynamic verbs. When this has happened, the perfect sense evolves. This is because the meaning of this construction when used with a non-change of state verb is more an action with lasting relevance rather than a state resulting from an action. In these constructions, the participle indicated earlier action (i.e. relative past tense), while the verb in the present, *habeo*, indicated that the action belonged to a period of time still current (that is, still relevant), the meaning of such phrases was close to that of a perfect; *I have bought the/a knife*.

This structure originally only occurred with transitive verbs and explicit agreeing objects (as in example 19). The process of grammaticalization can be observed in sentences like (24) and

(25). Here, the verb has lost parts of its specific lexical meaning, it has undergone semantic bleaching. According to Bybee et al. (1994:69), as we have seen in the previous sections, this kind of generalization comes about in discourse contexts when the resultative is used to set the stage for a subsequent action. In this way, its use is extended not only to denote actions that *produce* states but also actions that *precede* other actions. Consequently, the perfect sense evolves.

Instances that indicate grammaticalization are of two types. (24) exemplifies a use with a verb that is logically incompatible with the notion of possession. The sentence in (25) shows no agreement between noun and participle.

(24) Non transitive uses of verbs

Habeo intellectum

habe-o intellect-tum

have-1SG.PRES.IND understand-PAST.PART

‘I have understood’

(25) Phrases without agreement between participle and noun (Hopper and Traugott 2003:65)

Haec omnia probatum habemus

haec omni-a prob-atum habe-mus

those ACC.PL all-ACC.PL try-PART.PAST have-1.PL.PRES.IND

‘We have tried all those things’

2.5.2 Phonological development

The phonological development of the *habere*-construction is a good example of the frequency effects mentioned in 2.1.2.1. *Habeo* underwent extreme substantial and temporal phonological reduction as a result of increased frequency and became *he*. It is also an example of another frequency effect, that of preservation, since the verb does not exist elsewhere in Spanish, but has survived in this particular high frequency construction (cf. 2.1.2). The suffix of the participle, *-um*, reduced to *-o*, but this was an unconditioned sound change that occurred in Late Latin.

Since frequency is so closely related to phonological reduction it is interesting to see what elements in this development are results of general sound changes and which are results of frequency (for details see Penny 2002). It can be assumed that the deletion of final /o/ is a result of frequency, since this change has not generally occurred in Spanish; it is still called *canto*, not **cant*. Therefore, this development offers good evidence for the hypothesis that frequency leads to phonological reduction.

2.5.3 End result

The construction *habere* + PP has been grammaticalized and is now at a stage in Standard Spanish where it has undergone semantic bleaching and generalization of meaning, because the sense of the perfect is more general than the sense of the resultative, or in Langacker's terms, has become more schematic. He argues that the difference between grammatical and lexical categories only lies in the former's lesser degree of specificity (1987:58). According to Bybee et al. (1994:69), the perfect expresses that the action is relevant to the moment of speech in a much more *general* way than the resultative, which conveys the specific meaning that the *current state is a result of a past action*. Remember that the resultative has more restrictions on what elements it can combine with; this indicates a more specific meaning, as we saw in examples (22) and (23). Goldberg (2005:424) points out that "[t]he (...) construction will be as good a predictor of sentence meaning as the (...) verb". However, the more grammaticalized the construction is, the fewer restrictions there are on the elements that can occur within the construction. For example, originally, the *habere* + PP construction in Latin could only include verbs from a very small semantic group. In Spanish today there are no such restrictions. In Italian and French there are; unaccusative verbs are usually used with the auxiliary 'be', not 'have'.

However, saying that a form has lost meaning is not unproblematic. As mentioned in 2.3, it can be argued that a grammaticalized form has lost specific semantic content, but gained other, more abstract meaning components as well as pragmatic strength. What about *habere*? I find it difficult *not* to claim that this form has been semantically weakened. However, if we agree that it has generalized, the question that arises is the following: What is left? There is obviously something. How shall we describe this *something*?

First of all, we can say that the sense of possession is lost. I claim this because it is possible to compare two types of constructions that have undergone grammaticalization. As mentioned,

Latin had a way of making resultative also with intransitive verbs, that is, with the verb *esse*, ‘be’. This construction had disappeared completely from Spanish by the 16th century (Penny 2002:166), but still exists in Italian and French. I can not see any meaning difference between the two types of constructions in these languages, and it seems as if they both convey the same sense of anteriority without adding any flavour of possession to the construction.¹⁹ Therefore, we can say that the grammaticalization process of *habere*+PP has reached the anterior stage on the perfective path in Standard Spanish, and that the chain has come to completion in Italian, Rumanian and French, where it has developed into a perfective. In addition, it exemplifies a typical frequency effect; a verb that has disappeared elsewhere is preserved in a high frequency construction.

All in all, this development describes a predictable development, formal, semantic and functional, of the resultative construction in question. We are faced with a construction that has entered the path, and followed it exactly as predicted. However, in Rioplatense, it has not. In the next chapter I present evidence which suggest that this unexpected development; this halt in the path, has happened during the last hundred years.

¹⁹ The fact that two formally different items “convey the same sense of anteriority” may seem like a challenge to the principle of no synonymy, which says that “[i]f two constructions are syntactically distinct, they must be semantically or pragmatically distinct” (Goldberg 1995:67). However, the fact that they are in complementary distribution (i.e. that their distributions do not overlap; they can not appear with the same verbs), explains such an apparent synonymy. Arguing that the auxiliaries in question are a challenge to the principle of no synonymy would be like claiming that different past tense morphemes in Norwegian are, because they do have the same semantic content, but are formally distinct.

3. The way things were: Standard Spanish and Rioplatense, now and then

This chapter is dedicated to describing Standard Spanish and Rioplatense at different synchronic stages. Such schematic descriptions of the relevant tense/aspect distinctions are necessary in order to give a full presentation of the topic in question. The present subject is based on the hypothesis that a change has occurred, so a description of the way things *used to be* is required in order to argue that the present stage actually is different from an older stage. The description of Rioplatense a century ago is the most important one; this is the basis for the assumption that a change actually has occurred, and is also pivotal for the understanding of the time span of the change in question.

It should be noted that all varieties described have a past imperfective aspect. This fact must be included in the description since it is relevant for the further development of a perfect/preterit. Bybee et al. (1994:85) note that it is the existence of a past imperfective that decides whether the Perfect (or in the Rioplatense case, the Preterit), when it generalizes, becomes a simple past or a perfective. In German, for example, when the Perfect generalizes (as it now does), it will not become a perfective but a simple past, since German has no past imperfective that it can contrast with. So when Preterit is generalizing, as in Rioplatense, it does not become a simple past but a perfective, which contrasts with the past imperfective. Since good descriptions of the tense/aspect systems in both old and contemporary Standard Spanish do exist, I present the relevant tenses in simplified tables. The description of Rioplatense is more complicated, since I was unable to find it in a grammar and had to generalize on the basis of different written sources. In section 3.2.1 I discuss my choice of sources and why I find them reliable.

3.1 Rioplatense Spanish ca. 1900

In order to define the frequent use of the Preterit in Rioplatense as an actual change it is necessary to present evidence for the fact that the Perfect actually used to be more frequent than it is today. If this is the case, two conclusions can be drawn. The most important is the following; a change has happened in Rioplatense that does not fit with neither empiric data nor Bybee et al.'s Theory of paths. That is, in a language state where the distinction between perfect and preterit was alive, the latter has unexpectedly replaced the former. In addition, it

gives an idea of the time span of the change in question. In order to investigate the distribution of the Perfect and the Preterit in Rioplatense in the 19th century²⁰, I had to use written sources; the lack of oral sources is in this case evident. In the next section the choice of sources is explained.

3.1.1 The choice of sources

The first source is a particularly interesting grammar, a description of Argentinean Spanish from 1900; Lucien Abeille's *Idioma nacional de los argentinos*. Since this book's main goal is to describe the idiosyncrasies of the Argentinean dialect, I find this source reliable. This type of source is what can be labelled *contemporary commentaries*, which have been important sources in historical linguistics. They have a typical *negative* approach to grammar and usage (Schneider 2002:79), and this prescriptiveness is precisely what makes these kinds of sources reliable. Subsequently, I see no reason as to why the author would not depict the dialectal differences as they actually appeared to be.

My other source is literature. I aimed to find sources with much dialogue, that is, plays. The Argentinean source is Florencio Sánchez' plays. According to Bybee et al. (1994:282), "[t]he question of mechanisms of change is most profitably studied by a close examination of texts which show a change in process" (obviously where no oral sources are available). However, a literary source does not necessarily reflect the actual spoken language. For example, an Argentinean writer might use the Perfect more frequently in text than in the spoken language following a standard orthographic convention (as pointed to in chapter 1). The reliability of a text and its relative proximity to speech is necessary to examine in order to use it as a source. According to Schneider (2002:71), a main requirement for a text to function as a source is its closeness to speech and vernacular styles. He also points out that different text types condition their proximity to speech. Theatre is such a type, in the sense that it does condition such proximity. The plays used were selected on the basis of two elements; their proximity to speech and their age (the older, the better). In the following, I first present Abeille's grammar, and then argue for the reliability of the play I have chosen as a source, before I turn to Sánchez' plays.

²⁰ I would of course have preferred to describe the distribution in an older state, but I was not able to find reliable sources that were any older than from the end of the 19th century.

3.1.2 Abeille's *Idioma nacional de los argentinos* (1900)

Lucien Abeille's (1900) book *Idioma nacional de los argentinos* is a descriptive grammar of the Argentinean dialect. It aims to describe various aspects of the dialect; morphology, syntax, phonology and phonetics. Many of the elements described are actual parts of the Argentinean dialect today (e.g. the verb conjugation of 2SG). In addition, the author dedicates a chapter to the use of the Perfect vs. the use of the Preterit. In itself this is an indication that there really was something uncommon there to note.

Abeille (1900:249) defines the synthetic Preterit in Spanish as the “pretérito definido”. He defines the periphrastic Perfect as the “pretérito indefinido”. He describes their distribution the following way (my translation):

“Spanish prefers the use of the pretérito definido. In Argentinean and French the use of the pretérito indefinido is more frequent” (...) “Spanish, using the pretérito definido expresses the notion of the past tense. Argentinean, using the pretérito indefinido emphasizes the level of movement, of progress of the action. There is in this a morphological change caused by a psychological change.”

Abeille's attempt to explain the change is not important here, what is important is the fact that he describes the use of the Perfect as the most frequent in Argentinean Spanish. He compares this use with the use of the same form in French. In French the *passé simple*, the Preterit, has disappeared from the spoken language (Bybee 1994:81, Comrie 1976:61). This fact is interesting, because it seems that we have two languages on the same grammaticalization path, where one has followed the expected development (French), while the other has not (Argentinean). The data from the play I studied also suggest that the Perfect was very frequent, as we now shall see.

3.1.3 Sánchez' *Obras Completas* (1968)

Florencio Sánchez' (Montevideo, Uruguay 1875 - Milan, Italy 1910) first play was first staged in Buenos Aires in 1903. His plays are excellent sources of the vernacular of Rioplatense since they attempt to reflect the spoken language. The author is not approaching a Standard Spanish norm, and the use of the Perfect can therefore be assumed to be reflecting an actual spoken fact. In the next sections, I will show how this vernacular style is manifested throughout his plays, on different linguistic layers. Not all the elements are uniquely

associated with an Argentinean variety, but they are all different from the standard orthographic convention.

3.1.3.1 Lexicon

The following terms are not associated with a Standard Spanish variety (but rather with a Rioplatense variety) and would probably not be included if the author used the standard norm:

Table 2. Lexicon

Rioplatense	Standard Spanish equivalent	Meaning
gurí (11)	chico	boy
pavada (26)	tontería	nonsense
chusma (13)	chismorreo	gossip

3.1.3.2. Morphology and morphosyntax

The personal 2SG pronoun *vos* is used in Rioplatense (as opposed to *tú* in the rest of the Spanish speaking world²¹) (Fontanella de Weinberg 1987:110-111, 117,119). This is kept in the text. The conjugation of the verbs in the 2SG present also has a different paradigm. (Penny 2002:139). This conjugation is also kept:

Table 3. Morphology/Morphosyntax

Rioplatense	Standard Spanish equivalent	Meaning
vos sabés (14)	tú sabes	you know
vos podés (26)	tú puedes	you can
vos sos (29)	tú eres	you are

²¹ With the exception of some Central American regions and Paraguay (Penny 2002:139).

The following example shows this:

(1)

Vos sos mi amiga

vos sos mi amiga

you be 2SG.PRES.IND my friend

‘You are my friend’

The conjugation of the second person plural does not follow the Standard Spanish norm (Penny 2002:139):

Table 4. 2PL

Rioplatense	Standard Spanish equivalent	Meaning
ustedes son	vosotros soís	you (PL) are

(2)

Ustedes son mis amigas

ustedes son mis amigas

you 2PL be 2.PL.PRES.IND my friends

‘You are my friends’

3.1.3.3 Phonology/phonetics/prosody

Several characteristics of the Rioplatense pronunciation (cf. Fontanella de Weinberg 1987) are reflected in the text as the author commits orthographic errors in order to reflect the dialect:

Table 5. Deletion of intervocalic /d/

Rioplatense	Standard Spanish equivalent	Meaning
condenao (12)	condenado	sentenced
criao (12)	criado	raised
ha levantao (12)	ha levantado	he/she has got up
ha mudao (15)	ha mudado	he/she has moved

Table 6. /kt/ > /t/

Rioplatense	Standard Spanish equivalent	Meaning
dotor (11)	doctor	doctor

Table 7. d > Ø / _#

Rioplatense	Standard Spanish equivalent	Meaning
ciuda	ciudad	city
verda (39)	verdad	truth

Table 8. /b/ > /g/

Rioplatense	Standard Spanish equivalent	Meaning
güen (15)	buen	good
güenasa (12)	buenasa	very good
güey (17)	buey	ox

The characteristic prosody of the 2SG imperative which has the stress on the last syllable (as opposed to the first) is also reflected (Fontanella de Weinberg 1987:119, 156):

Table 9. Stress

Rioplatense	Standard Spanish equivalent	Meaning
seguí (27)	sigue	follow/keep going!
dejá (12)	deja	stop!
mirá (13)	mira	look!

In Spanish the subjunctive is used if the imperative clause is negated. The subjunctive 2SG normally has stress on the first syllable both in Standard Spanish and in Rioplatense. Stress on the second syllable does however exist in Rioplatense, but is considered as being part of a rural, low class vernacular. This stress is found in the text:

Table 10. Stress in 2SG subjunctive

Rioplatense	Standard Spanish equivalent	Meaning
no me toqués (33)	no me toques	don't touch me
no te acerqués (33)	no te acerques	don't go near

3.1.4 The Perfect/Preterit distinction in Florencio Sánchez' plays

On the basis of the findings presented in the preceding section I considered Sánchez' plays to be a reliable source of spoken Rioplatense around 1900. I therefore used it to study the distribution of the Perfect/Preterit.

My findings from the play strongly suggest that the Perfect was alive in Rioplatense in the end of the 19th century in a way that it is not today. The Perfect seems to have been used according to Bybee et al.'s (1994:61-62) definition as "a past with current relevance". The following examples illustrate this fact:

(3)

¡La pobre **ha tenido** que madrugar pa ir al registro! (98)

la pobre ha ten-ido que madrugar pa ir al registro

the poor have 3SG.PRES.IND have-PAST.PART to get up early to go to the register

'The poor thing has had to get up early to go to the register'

(4)

¡Me **han matao** a mi hombre! (92)

me han mat-ado a mi hombre

me have 3PL.PRES.IND kill-PAST.PART to my man

'They have killed my man'

The use is even extended to instances that do not denote current relevance (i.e. it seemed to be generalizing), suggesting, together with the phonological reduction of the participle (see 2.1.2.1), that the form was well on the way on its grammaticalization path.

(5)

Anoche **ha cruzado** la pierna y se **ha puesto** después a palmearlo (18)

anoche ha cruz-ado la pierna y se ha puesto después a palmearlo

last night have 3SG.PRES.IND cross-PAST.PART the leg and have 3SG.PRES.IND start PAST.PART to applaud it

'Last night crossed his leg and after that he started to applaud it'

(6)

¿Lo **han visto** a noche? (16)

lo han visto a noche

him have 2PL.PRES.IND see PAST.PART at night

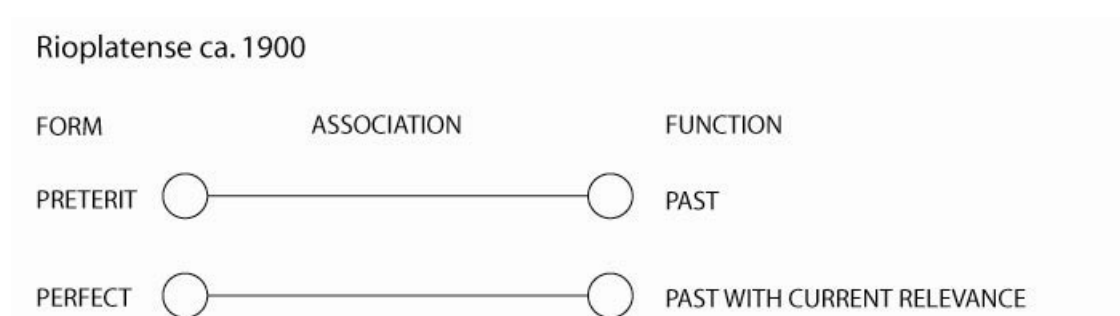
‘Did you see him last night?’

This generalization is consistent with Abeille’s claim that the Perfect was in fact very frequent in Rioplatense in the 19th century.

3.1.5 Conclusions

As a whole, the factors mentioned here, namely the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and lexicon as we find them in Sánchez’ text, make this a reliable source of the Spanish spoken in the Río de la Plata-area by the end of the 19th century. It is highly unlikely that the author would follow the Standard Spanish orthographic norm when it came to verbal tenses (i.e. use the Perfect more extensively), when this norm is abandoned in all other aspects. In addition, the play examined suggests that the distinction was well alive in Rioplatense a hundred years ago. This fact, combined with Abeille’s claims, as well as the data from the old informants (as we shall see in next chapter), all point to the frequency of the Perfect. Therefore I claim that the distribution of the Perfect/Preterit in Rioplatense around 1900 was as follows:

Figure 5. Rioplatense ca. 1900



Having said this, the study of the Rioplatense variety can continue on the assumption that the distribution of the Perfect/Preterit was different a century ago. As we shall see, this is precisely what the data suggest.

3.1.6 Contemporary literary sources

Before continuing it should be noted that a preliminary study of contemporary plays, song lyrics and other literary sources do reflect the change that has occurred, that is, that the Preterit has taken over for the Perfect. As a whole, the distribution is very different from that depicted in Sánchez' plays. As expected, a play from 1966-67 by Francisco Urondo (*Muchas felicidades*) shows great inconsistency in the use of the Preterit and the Perfect, which is typical of an ongoing change that has not fully come to completion (which is precisely what we will observe in the data of the informants). For example, the play has instances of the same adverb (*siempre*, "always") used with both the Preterit and the Perfect, as in the following sentences:

(7)

Siempre lo **tuviste** a él, siempre **tuviste** un hombre cerca
siempre lo tuv-iste a el siempre tuv-iste un hombre cerca
always him have-2SG.PRET of him always have-2SG.PRET a man close
'You've always had him; you've always had a man close'

(Urondo 1971:16)

(8)

Para vos las cosas siempre **han sido** fáciles
para vos las cosas siempre han sido fáciles
for you the thing always have 3PL.PRES.IND be PAST.PART easy
'For you everything has always been easy'

(Urondo 1971:16)

Such inconsistency in the use of tense with identical adverbs is precisely what is observed in the speech of the old informants in my survey (and to some extent also the middle aged), as I turn to in 5.1.1. This inconsistency is not commonly observed today. It seems as if today, the change has manifested itself also orthographically. For example, the Argentinean contemporary singer Fito Páez consistently uses the preterit, also with temporal adverbs, which are typically used with perfect, as in the following:

(9)

Son las nueve todavía no **pude** comer
son las nueve todavía no pud-e comer
be the nine yet not can-1SG.PRET eat
'It's nine and I haven't eaten yet'

(10)

En nuestra vida real siempre **fuimos** decadentes
en nuestra vida real siempre fu-imos decadentes
in our life real always be-1PL.PRET decadent
'In our real life have we always been decadent'

Actually, in the lyrics from the Páez double album *Honestidad brutal* (2001) the Perfect does not occur once and the use of the preterit is 100 %, exactly as it is in my data from adolescent speakers of Buenos Aires Spanish. In this way, we can assume that the change has taken place not only in the spoken language, but it has become conventional enough to be used in written texts. It is perfectly possible to view the first evidence of a change as evidence that the change has actually taken place (Hopper and Traugott 2003:48). Methodologically, a change can be assumed to have taken place when a) it has evidently spread from the individual and been accepted by the group and b) the constraints of the former linguistic environment are no longer obligatory. This is indeed what my data, both the secondary and, as we shall see, the primary sources show. Criterion a) is met through the fact that the change is reflected in literature and in all of the informants. Criterion b) is fulfilled by the fact that environments that originally called for the perfect (those of current relevance, persistent situations, recent past and experientiality) now call for the preterit. If we are to use this definition, the literary sources I have and will present suggest that the change happened somewhere in the beginning of the 20th century.

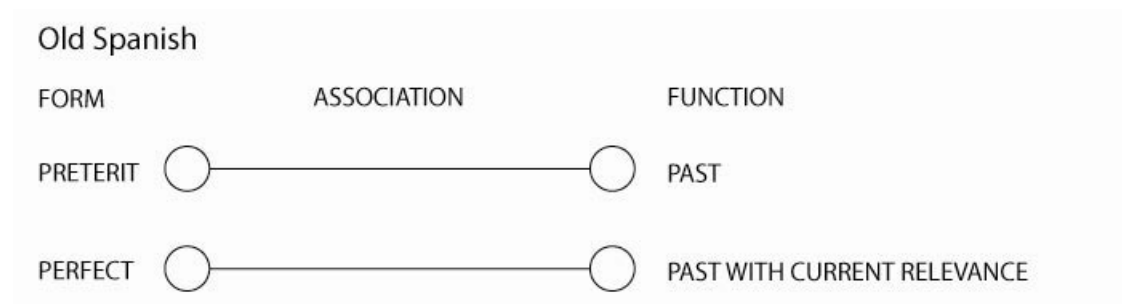
3.2 Standard Spanish

3.2.1 Old Spanish

Old Spanish had a system similar to the one we find in Standard Spanish today. This is the system we can assume was spoken by the colonizers of South America; and we can assume

that the distinction between perfect and preterit was alive (Penny 2002:168). This seems consistent with the findings from the Rioplatense dialect around 1900.

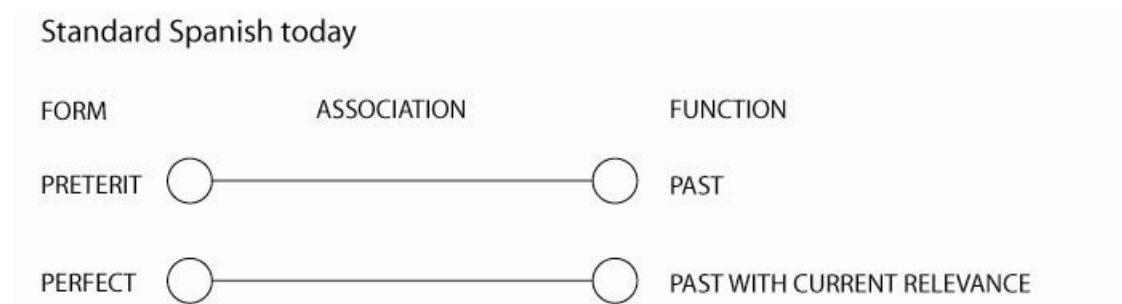
Figure 6. Old Spanish



3.2.2 Standard Spanish today

The Standard Spanish situation can be schematized as follows. Note that the distribution is the same as that of Rioplatense ca. 1900, as well as for Old Spanish.

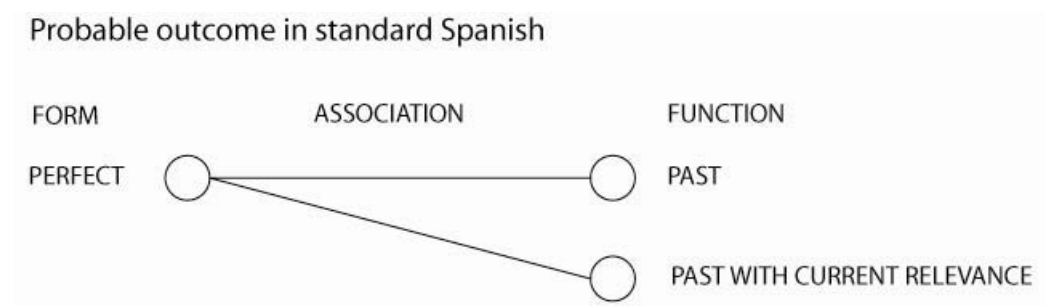
Figure 7. Standard Spanish



3.2.3 Probable outcome in Standard Spanish

There seems to be a tendency in Standard Spanish towards an increasing use of the Perfect (Alonso and Henríquez Ureña 1941, Bybee et al. 1994, Comrie 1976). It is likely that the perfective path will come to completion in this variety, creating the following result (the opposite of the probable outcome in Rioplatense):

Figure 8. Probable outcome



4. Field and method

4.1 General

The data were collected in Argentina and Uruguay during a stay in the spring of 2006. Argentina and Uruguay are both situated in South America, have Atlantic coastline and are partly divided by the Río de la Plata River. Argentina has 40 million inhabitants, Uruguay only 3 million. The objective for going was the collection of data that would include what I expected to be an unusual frequency of the Preterit instead of the Perfect in perfect function. I had this expectation mostly based on my own knowledge of the variety spoken in the Río de la Plata-area (I had lived a year in Dolores, Uruguay and a year in Buenos Aires, Argentina prior to going there in 2006). I also conducted a pilot study²² in 2005 which suggested that my assumption would be confirmed.

Figure 9. Map of Argentina



²² I interviewed 2 Uruguayans and 1 Argentinean. The data are consistent with the ones collected in 2006.

I collected data in different cities in Argentina and Uruguay, which I originally intended to include in the study. I chose, however, to use only the data from Buenos Aires, and in this way omitting the geographical variable. I found that if I included the geographical variable, this would not add an important dimension. However, as a more impressionistic observation, it seemed that the use of the Perfect in both the other Argentinean cities, and the Uruguayan cities, was a lot more frequent than it was in Buenos Aires. As a matter of fact, it seemed to be preferred among the non educated, young informants from the countryside in Uruguay (in the city of Dolores). This is unfortunately not within the scope of the present work; it is rather a good source for further studies. Instead, I will concentrate on the data from Buenos Aires, the semantic and functional properties of the Perfect and the way these have been replaced by the Preterit.

4.1.1 Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires is the capital of Argentina and has 12 million inhabitants. It is situated on the shore of Río de la Plata, and is the cultural and economical centre of the country. It is often referred to only as *capital*, since Buenos Aires is the name of a region, not only a city. Many of the informants refer to Buenos Aires as *capital*. The inhabitants of Buenos Aires are known as *Porteños* (of *puerto*; ‘port’). The city was first founded, probably by Mestizos, in 1580. The indigenous people that lived there were killed or forcefully integrated, and today they make up less than 3 % of the population.

4.1.1.1 Sociolinguistic situation

Two factors make the linguistic situation of Argentina, and particularly Buenos Aires, interesting. First, after the conquest of South America by the Spanish in the 16th century, the main contact with Spain was through Mexico and Lima. Some areas, such as Argentina and Uruguay, remained more remote both culturally and geographically. For instance, until the 19th century the most common way to reach Buenos Aires was by way of a very long overland journey. This may explain why the Argentinean variety of Spanish differs more from the Standard Spanish variety than other dialects of South- and Central American Spanish. This discrepancy is manifested morphosyntactically, phonologically and lexically (Penny 2000, 2002).

Second, and more importantly, the Argentinean constitution of 1853 opened for immigration. In the second half of the 19th century Argentina was an underpopulated country with lots of fertile land and natural resources. Local labour was insufficient and immigration became essential for economic growth (Baily 1999, Germani 1968). This resulted in enormous waves of immigrants that kept coming until about 1930. The immigrants entered almost exclusively through the port of Buenos Aires, and the main part of them settled in the neighbourhoods around the port, in La Boca (where the ships arrived) and San Telmo (see figure 2). In 1869, Buenos Aires had 178.000 inhabitants, of which 88.000 were foreigners. In 1895, 49 % of the foreigners were Italians (Cancellier 1996:3). This situation would continue well into the 20th century. In 1887, Italians accounted for 32 % of the population in Buenos Aires, whereas native Argentineans accounted for 47 % (Baily 1983:284). By 1914, nearly a million Italians lived in Argentina. In comparison, only half a million more Italians lived in the US (Baily 1983:281). In 1991, the percentage of non-natives living in Argentina had dropped to 5 %.

The Italian immigrants came primarily from two parts of Italy, from Piedmont, situated in the North West, and from the south, that is, Sicilia, Calabria (Baily 1999:62). Before 1900, about 50 % of the Italians that emigrated were from the north, but after 1900, the tendency changed and the number of southerners to emigrate increased from about 39 % to over 50% of the Italians. Immigrants also came in large numbers from Spain, France, Poland and the Middle East.

We can imagine that the vast immigration created a very special and extreme kind of contact situation between Italian and Spanish in the Argentinean capital about 100 years ago. However, since Spanish was the official language, and the one used in schools, Italians had to adjust, as they did. Baily (1999) argues that Italian children only first learned Spanish when they started school. The massive pressure from a monolingual education must be one of the reasons why the Italian speakers shifted to Spanish in the course of just one generation. In fact, certain Argentinean politicians at the time were actually worried Spanish might disappear completely in favour of Italian (Colantoni and Gurlekian 2004). Baily (1999) quotes a third generation immigrant from Liguria who described the situation in the area of La Boca (cf. table 2) in the beginning of the 20th century as one in which the Italian Genovese dialect was the dominant variety. As a whole, the number of immigrants from Liguria (Genova is in Liguria), was low, this is why this region does not show in the statistics. In certain areas of Buenos Aires (as la Boca), however, this was the most influential group, and the Genovese dialect is often referred to as the one having the most influence on the Buenos

Aires dialect. He claims that not only did Italians speak Genovese; Jews, Spanish, Basques and Syrians had to use Italian as well, so that Italian functioned as some sort of a lingua franca in the Argentinean capital. Though this may be an exaggeration, it illustrates the perceived importance of the Italian language.

Figure 10. Map of Buenos Aires, Capital Federal. Division into regions.



Río de la Plata

4.2 Variables

4.2.1 Age

I was inspired by sociolinguistic method in choosing my subjects, in that I chose different variables in order to get a good picture of the linguistic situation. However, as briefly mentioned above, I chose not to concentrate on the geographical variable in this specific work. My main extralinguistic variable was *age*. Since I mostly aim to discuss the phenomenon diachronically and synchronically, but not concentrate on the synchronic

variation among classes, nor geography, age is a particularly useful variable. It can say a lot about the time span of the change in question. In this case, as we shall see, it strongly supports my hypothesis, in that the use of the preterit differs in frequency between the old and the young informants (adolescents 100%, old 64 %). I also aimed to have an even proportion of sexes (40 % men vs. 60% women). The informants were divided into four age groups; Old (61-90), Middle aged (41-60), Young (21-40) and Adolescent (0-20).

4.2.2 A sociolinguistic study? Possible objections to the method

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the number of informants may be questioned. It may also be questioned why certain variables such as social status and geographic belonging between different cities are omitted. However, the present study is not intended to be a sociolinguistic one. I am *inspired* by sociolinguistic method in using one extralinguistic variable. This variable, *age*, is chosen because it can be particularly valuable to the present approach.

First of all, objections as to the number of informants used may arise. This is expected; in fact, the number of informants to be included in a sociolinguistic work is an unsolved problem (Silva-Corvalán 2001:45-46). Still, using the method presented in Hopper and Traugott (2003), that one occurrence of a morphological change is an indication of a change actually happening, the number seems legitimate. How could a grammaticalization process occur in the speech of one single person? It seems unlikely (impossible, actually), since grammaticalization takes time, and speakers need to be understood. The use of a novel form in new contexts that other informants do not understand would not fit with Grice's co-operative principle (1975). It would perhaps also count as a violation of the Maxim of Manner (the contribution should be perspicuous, avoiding obscurity and *ambiguity*), and possibly the Maxim of Relevance (contributions should be relevant to the current purpose of exchange).

When it comes to the distribution of the Perfect and the Preterit among the older informants, a greater number would of course be desirable. However, the fact that the data from the informants actually present are combined with literary sources, make an in my view reliable sample. The literary sources strongly support the collected data material. In addition, if I were to include more informants, where should I stop? Silva-Corvalán (2001:46) points out that the number of informants may vary according to which problem the researcher aims to study. As to the present study, a larger number of informants would probably not bring us

closer to an understanding of the phenomenon in question, and it would be difficult to fit with the format of the present work.

Also, the informants are quite homogenous when it comes to social status and level of education. Again, the goal of the study is not a sociolinguistic one, and the aim of the present study is achieved without such parameters (no matter how interesting including them might be).

The lack of further sociolinguistic variables is therefore a deliberate choice. The present work is above all a description of a morphosyntactic change, and this change can well be documented without variables such as social class and geographical affiliation. Of course, to include such parameters would be interesting, but it is also necessary to take into account the fact that the format of the present thesis is limited, and the choice of variables must be highly selected. The choice of the variable *age* has revealed an element that for the present is the most valuable; it actually says something about the time span of the change in question.

4.2.3 The Uruguayan data

As mentioned, my initial plan was to include Uruguayan data in the present work. Because of the limited format I have not had the possibility. However, some remarks are appropriate as to these data as well. Even though I have not studied them in detail the way I have done with the Argentinean data, one feature struck me in my more impressionistic approach to the distribution of the Perfect and the Preterit: the Perfect was much more frequent among the Uruguayans than among the Porteños. Especially among the younger informants from the countryside (Dolores, situated 200 km. from the capital); they actually seemed to prefer the Perfect, and it seemed to be expanding.

4.2.4 The Informants

The informants were between 13 and 86 years old, all grew up in Buenos Aires, and all except informant number 6, Paula, were born there. The names are fictitious. I present the informants in more detail in the following table:

Table 11. Informants

	Na- me	Sex	Age	Profession	Studies	Place of origin	Origins of parents (F and M)	Biling- ual?
1	Ana	F	87	Teacher	University	Buenos Aires, San Telmo	Argentina and Brazil	No
2	Juan	M	87	Professor	University	Buenos Aires	Italy	?
3	Pedro	M	57	Office worker	University	Buenos Aires	Argentina (both)	No
4	Laura	F	52	Journalist	University	Buenos Aires, Quilmes	Turin, Italy (both)	Yes, Italian
5	María	F	25	Employee in bank	University	Buenos Aires, Centro	Argentina	No
6	Paula	F	25	Un- employed, single mother	Un-finished high school	Uruguay (grew up in Buenos Aires)	Uruguay	No
7	Inés	F	26	Radio hostess	-	Buenos Aires, Recoleta	Argentina	No
8	Jorge	M	22	Student	University	Gran Buenos Aires	Argentina	No
9	Javier	M	17	Student	Student, high school	Buenos Aires, Quilmes	Argentina (both)	No
10	Lucía	F	13	Student	Student, high school	Buenos Aires, Recoleta	Unknown, Argentina	No

4.2.5 The Interviews

The interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes. The informants were tape recorded in an informal setting, e.g. in their or my house. Most of the informants were not at all reluctant to being interviewed. In order to avoid any hypercorrection (c.f. *The observer's paradox*, Labov 1983), I did not inform them of the exact object of the study. I did however of course inform them about the fact that I was investigating the dialect of the Río de la Plata. I do believe that I avoided hypercorrection, especially since many of the interviews were with people I knew very well, making the setting informal. I do not believe, however, that the Porteños are likely to show much linguistic insecurity (cf. Silva-Corvalán 2001:35) because of their consciousness of the fact that they belong the obvious cultural, economical and political centre of the country. In fact, informant nr. 5, María, said the following when describing the

difference between the dialect in Buenos Aires and the dialect in northern Argentina, indicating precisely this linguistic self esteem:

María: Usan otros tiempos verbales

Interviewer: ¿Cuales?

María: El “he visto”, “he conocido”. Nosotros acá en capital ni enpedo los usamos

My translation:

María: They use other verbal tenses

Interviewer: Which ones?

María: The “I have seen”, “I have known”. We here in the capital wouldn’t use them even if we were pissed drunk

4.2.5.1 The Structure of the Interviews

The interviews were semi structured (Silva-Corvalán 2001:57), in the sense that I both wanted the informants to speak spontaneously, but at the same time to talk in a tense that would make the use of the Perfect in situations likely (i.e. situations that normally call for the perfect). That is, I wanted to trigger the emergence of possible variation cases. To obtain this, I created triggering contexts by typically asking my informants questions of the following type:

(1)

¿**Hiciste** muchos viajes?

hic-iste muchos viajes

do-2SG.PRET many travels

‘Have you done much travelling?’

(2)

¿**Probaste** alguna vez el chorizo?

prob-aste alguna vez el chorizo

try-2.SG.PRET any time the chorizo

‘Have you ever tasted *chorizo*?’

It may seem that I lead the informants to use the preterit, since I, the interviewer, used it in the questions. I was of course aware of this possibility, but since I speak this way myself it would

feel very unnatural to change my own morphosyntax in the interviews. As a matter of fact, such a change would probably be *more* likely to lead to hypercorrection, since the interview session is in itself formal, and the Perfect may be associated with formality. I don't however believe that my use made any difference, for two reasons: 1) many informants (from the Uruguayan data) used the Perfect frequently even though I did not, and 2) the inhabitants of Buenos Aires showed so little linguistic insecurity that it seemed unlikely that they would autocorrect themselves.

Initially I tried to formulate the questions in a way that was neutral as to past tense and aspect, saying for instance:

(3)

¿Que **conocés** de Argentina?

que conoc-és de argentina

what know-2SG.PRES.IND of argentina

'What parts of Argentina do you know?'

I soon found out that this tactic often resulted in the informants answering in the present tense (answering for instance *Conozco Bariloche*, 'I know Bariloche'), and that was not useful for me. What else is, I soon discovered that monologue did not tend to include much use of the preterit with current relevance (the form in question). What it did include, as the type frequency of the preterit from the data shows, was standard use of the preterit, that is, contexts in which also a Standard Spanish variety would require it. This is hardly surprising; the preterit is typically used for expressing a past event for its own sake; it is associated with "true narrative" (Anderson 1982:230, Dahl 1985:112-113). I discovered that dialogue was a better generator of use of the preterit, so I would participate more in the interviews, and sometimes also interview two informants at the same time. I believe that the increased use of the Perfect in these contexts is due to the fact that the informants would ask questions, either to me or to the other informant, like in the following examples:

(4) Informant 5

¿Vos no **viajaste** nunca al norte vos?

vos no viaj-aste nunca al norte vos

you not travel-2.SG.PRET never to the north you

'Have you ever travelled to the north?'

(5) Informant 5

¿Mi hermana **recorrió** todo te **contó**?

mi hermana recorri-ó todo te cont-ó

my sister travel-3.SG.PRET all she tell-3.SG.PRET

‘My sister has travelled through all of it, has she told you?’

4.2.6 The Data

In this work I use data from the 11 previously mentioned informants. The recordings²³ have been analyzed in two ways:

a) The entire corpus was coded on the basis of the following definitions (outlined in 2.2.1), to find the type frequency (that is, the frequency of the members of a pattern, in this case occurrence of the preterit) and to analyze the contexts of the occurrences:

Preterit: a situation that occurred prior to the speech event

Perfect: denotes that the situation is temporally preceding the moment of speech or another point of reference and has current relevance.

Preterit with perfect function: preterit used in contexts that normally call for the perfect, following the above definition

b) In order to study the perfect in more detail, since this is the main subject of my thesis, I will study the data in light of five functions or meanings that are relevant to the perfect (Bybee et al. 1994, Anderson 1982:228, Comrie 1976:56-61). In this way I aim to investigate whether all these functions are equally replaced by the preterit, or whether there are differences. The functions/meanings are resultative, experiential, persistent situation and recent past. As discussed in chapter 2, current relevance is not regarded as a particular function (as it is in for instance Buescher 2004), but as more of a prototypical value that they all share.

4.2.6.1 Resultative

The present state is result of a past action, and is thus a clear manifestation of present relevance of a past situation.

²³ To obtain the recordings, please contact the author.

(6) Informant nr. 10

No tango voy a empezar el mes que viene porque
no tango voy a empezar el mes que viene porque
no tango go to start the month that come because

como ahora **augmentó** y sale cuarenta antes salía treinta
como ahora aument-ó y sale cuarenta antes salía treinta
like now increase-3.SG.PRET and cost forty before cost thirty
'No, I'm going to start tango next month because now it has increased and costs 40, before it
costed 30'

Here, the new price is a result of the fact that is has increased (*aumentó*).

(7) Informant nr. 4

Vas a la comisaría y decís "**Perdí** un documento"
vas a la comiseria y decís perd-í un documento
go to the police station and say lose-1.SG.PRET a document
'You go to the police station and say "I've lost an ID card"

The following is also an instantiation of the most prototypical use of the perfect category most central member, the resultative, expressed in the preterit:

(8)

Si **tomaste** no manejes
si tom-aste no manejes
if drink-2SG.PRET not drink
'If you have drunk, don't drive'

www.varelaenred.com.ar/barman/htm/5/10-06

This example is a good illustration of the concrete relevance of the resultative. If you have had a drink, you should not drive (as a result of the drinking). The following function, however, indicates relevance in a much more abstract way (cf. 2.2.1.1).

4.2.6.2 Experiential

The experiential function indicates that certain knowledge or experiences are attributable to the agent due to past experiences. This past experience is placed temporally somewhere before the present. In Spanish, it is possible to specify the time of the event, but then it no longer has perfect function (*Juan fue a París en el 1950*). However, used without temporal specification, it has perfect function in Rioplatense, as in (9):

(9) Informant nr. 10

Fui a Gualeguaychú, a San Rafael de Mendoza, a Tandí, a Ezeiza y nada más

fu-i a gualeguaychu a san rafael de mendoza a tandi a ezeiza y nada mas

go-1SG.PRET to gualeguaychu to san rafael de mendoza to tandi to ezeiza and no more

a cinco lugares **fui**

a cinco lugares fu-i

to five places go-1SG.PRET

‘I’ve been to Gualeguaychú, to San Rafael de Mendoza, to Tandí, to Ezeiza and nowhere else.

I’ve been to five places’

Example (9) illustrates the abstract relevance associated with the experiential. In a sense, the fact that the informant has been to the mentioned places is relevant to her present situation, but arguably in a quite different sense than the relevance expressed in 8.

4.2.6.3 Persistent situations

This function of the perfect describes a situation that started in the past but persists in the present. Many languages prefer a present construction to express this. In Spanish, the present construction is frequent, but as we see in the translation of (10), in English the Perfect is used:

(10)

Hace diez años que estoy viviendo acá

hace diez años que estoy viviendo acá

do 3SG.PRES.IND years that I am living PRES.PART here

‘I’ve lived here for ten years’

However, constructions with the present are not always used in Buenos Aires Spanish, as the following examples show:

(11)

Nací acá siempre **viví** acá en la cortada

nac-í acá siempre viv-í acá en la cortada

born-1SG.PRET always live-1SG.PRET here on la cortada

‘I was born here and I’ve always lived here on *La Cortada*’

www.revistaelabasto.com.ar/MarioFacco.htm

(12) Informant nr. 7

Digo puta como puedo estar peleada

digo puta como puedo estar peleada

say whore how can 1SG.PRES.IND fight PAST.PART.FEM

con una amiga que **fue** toda la vida amiga

con una amiga que fu-e toda la vida mi amiga

with a friend who be-3.SG.PRET all my life my friend

‘I mean fuck how can I be fighting with a friend that has been a friend all my life’

4.2.6.4 Recent past

The perfect may be used “when the present relevance of the past situation referred to is simply one of temporal closeness” (Comrie 1976:60). For example, English only allows time specification with the perfect if it combines with an adverb that denotes immediate temporal closeness, as in (13):

(13)

I have just/recently been to Paris

but

* I have been in Paris last weekend

In Rioplatense, the recent past is either expressed through a construction with the present, which has the structure [acabar de + VERB _{INF}], as in (14):

(14)

Acabo de estar en tu casa
acab-o de estar en tu casa
end-1SG.PRES of be INF in your house
'I have just been in your house'

Or, the same meaning can be expressed using the preterit:

(15)

Estuve en tu casa recién
estuv-e en tu casa recién
be-1SG.PRET in your house just
'I have just been in your house'

The following example shows the recent past function expressed with the Preterit. The informant said this as the interview was going to an end, but before it was finished:

(16) Informant nr. 8

Te **saqué** charla no me digas que no
te saqu-é charla no me digas que no
you take out-1SG.PRET speech not me say that no
'I've made you a real speech don't tell me I haven't'

4.2.6.5 What can this tell us?

As presented above, the five different functions seem to be equally replaced by the Preterit among the younger informants. Among the older informants, however, the use seems to vary between the Preterit and the Perfect in different function. However, there seem to be no consistency in which functions are first replaced by the preterit; the mixing seems random. Therefore, it seems to be the entire category, and not some sub-function, that eventually has undergone change. Having said this, the next chapter discusses the extent to which the category distinction is lost in four different age groups.

5. The findings

5.1 The distribution of Preterit and Perfect in Rioplatense

The hypothesis driving the present thesis is that the Preterit is expanding and replacing the Perfect, this way erasing the distinction between the two. If this is proved to be the case, a major morphosyntactic and semantic change has occurred in Rioplatense Spanish.

On the basis of collected data, I will study the type frequency of the preterit as opposed to that of the Perfect, and conclude that the type frequency of the Perfect is so low that I assume that it is disappearing. In addition, the division of the informants into four age groups allows us to recognize another pattern, that is, the diachronic dimension. I compare the distribution of the Preterit and the Perfect in the speech of the two age groups, this way discovering evidence for the change being new, that is, that the loss of a distinction has taken place during the last hundred years.

5.1.1 The distribution of the Preterit and the Perfect in different age groups

As discussed in chapter 4, the variable according to which the informants were chosen was that of age. The informants were divided into four age groups; 1: Old, 2: Middle Aged, 3: Young and 4: Adolescent. Details are provided in the following table:

Table 12. Age groups

	Group name	Age span
1	Old	61-90
2	Middle aged	41-60
3	Young	21-40
4	Adolescent	0-20

My first aim was to study the type frequency of the Preterit with perfect function, and to study the occurrences of the Perfect, which I expected to be few. To do this, I used the definition of the perfect (as “a situation that temporally precedes the moment of speech or another point of reference and has current relevance”; cf. 2.2.1.1), and studied the occurrence of preterit and

perfect on the basis of this definition. The percentages are calculated in the following way: the total of preterit and perfect tokens (with perfect function) in each group is studied as a whole. Then, the percentage expressed with the preterit is calculated. For instance, if the total of tokens of Perfect/Preterit is 100, and the number of Perfects used is 10, then the Preterit is used in 90 % of the cases in this age group, etc.

As we shall see in the tables in the following sections, the percentage of Preterits used in perfect function gradually increases. As argued in chapter 4, the data suggest a random distribution between the different functions of the category. Nothing indicates that one function is more frequently used with the Preterit or vice versa. Thus, the main emphasis in this chapter is on the percentages and what they indicate of the time span of the time in question. We shall see how the inconsistency in the choice of the Preterit and Perfect gradually decreases in the different age groups.

5.1.1.1 Age group 1: Old

Table 13. Age group 1

Tokens with perfect meaning	36
Of which the Perfect is used	15
Of which the Preterit is used	21
Total percentage of use of Preterit	58%

The Perfect is in this group used quite frequently. When used, it is always according to the standard definition of the perfect. However, there is evidence that a change is in progress. Though the perfect is used to convey anteriority, so is the preterit. There seems to be no consistency in the choice of the preterit as opposed to the perfect; the two appear randomly in the same constructions and with the same adverbs. Consider the following examples:

Informant nr.1

(1)

Yo **he ido** a Europa pero me gustaría ir a la parte norte

yo he ido a Europa pero me gustaría ir a la parte norte

i have go PAST.PART to europe but me like go to the part north

‘I have been to Europe but I would like to go to the northern parts’

(2)

¿No **fuiste** a Bariloche?

no fu-iste a Bariloche

not go-2.SG.PRET to Bariloche

‘You haven’t been to Bariloche?’

These examples show that the experiential is expressed both through the Perfect and the Preterit by the same informant, and there is no obvious difference between the two constructions, that is, there is no obvious reason for why the same tense would not be used. Other examples from the same informant also suggest that the function of ‘ongoing situation’ could also be expressed through both tenses:

(3)

Tiene quince hermanos todos **han trabajado** siempre la tierra

tiene quince hermanos todos han trabaj-ado siempre la tierra

have fifteen siblings all have 3PL.PRES.IND work-PAST.PART always the land

‘He has fifteen siblings they have all always been farmers’

(4)

Yo siempre **dije** hay dos cosas que no se deben pagar

yo siempre dij-e hay cosa-s que no se deben pagar

I always say-1.SG.PRET be things that not should pay

en este mundo la enseñanza y la salud

en est-e mundo la enseñanza y la salud

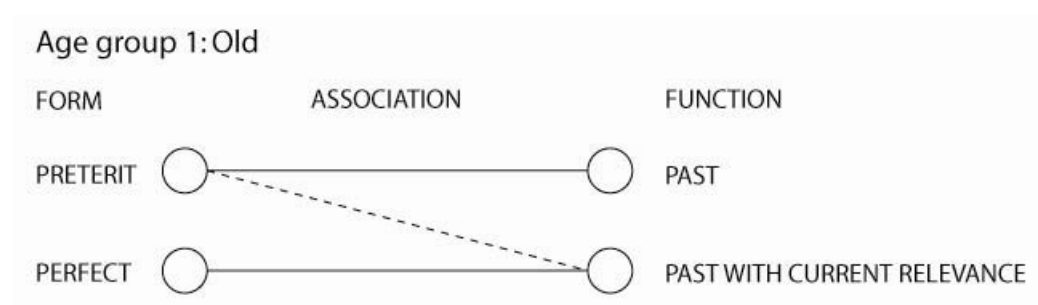
in this world the school and the health

‘I’ve always said that there are two things in this world that should be free; education and health care’

So, we observe that at least two of the functions of the perfect can be replaced by the Preterit also in the speech of older informants.

The distribution among the old informants can be schematized the following way (the stippled line refers to low frequency, and indicates that the Preterit is not yet fully associated with a past with current relevance):

Figure 11. Age group 1



5.1.1.2 Age group 2: Middle aged

Table 14. Age group 2

Tokens with perfect meaning	18
Of which the Perfect is used	2
Of which the Preterit is used	16
Total percentage of use of Preterit	89 %

Age group 2 exemplifies the increasing frequency of the Preterit; however, some inconsistency is still observable. In example (5), the informant uses the Perfect with a classical sense of ‘current relevance’, whereas in (6), the informant uses the Preterit to convey the function of ‘ongoing situation’, a typical perfect function.

Informant nr. 3

(5)

Yo **he leído** algunas cosas

yo he le-ído algunas cosas

I have 1SG.PRES read-PAST.PART some things

‘I have read some things’

Informant nr. 4

(6)

No se quieren mover de acá porque **vivieron** toda su vida acá

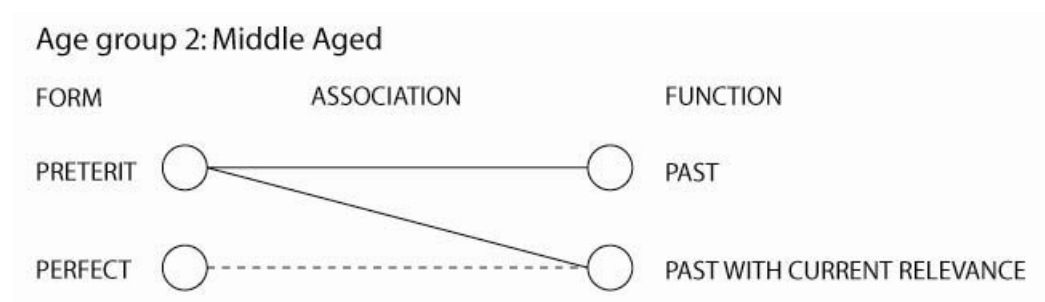
no se quieren mover de acá porque viv-ieron toda su vida acá

not want to move from here because live-3.PL.PRET all their life here

‘They don’t want to move because they have lived their whole life here’

Example (6) illustrates that the Preterit indeed is used to convey ‘ongoing situation’. This is an important finding, since it has been claimed that this use is not attested for Buenos Aires Spanish (e.g. Westmoreland 1998).

Figure 12. Age group 2



5.1.1.3 Age group 3: Young

Table 15. Age group 3

Tokens with perfect meaning	132
Of which the Perfect is used	5
Of which the Preterit is used	127
Total percentage of use of Preterit	96 %

The Perfect is almost completely absent in the speech of the younger informants. There are 5 Perfect tokens. The use of them seems completely random. Consider the following:

Informant nr. 6

(7)

No tener a nadie aparte porque no tenés a nadie
no tener a nadie aparte porque no tenés a nadie
not have of nobody besides because not have of nobody

esta bien tienen amigos se **han hecho**

bien tienen amigos se han hecho

be ok have friends have 3PL.PRES.IND make PAST.PART

amigos parejas todo

amigos parejas todo

friends couples everything

‘Not to have anyone because you don’t have anyone ok they have friends they have made some friends, couples, everything’

(8) Informant nr. 6

Lo que nos **hemos reído** con mi hermano yo no

lo que nos hemos re-ído con mi hermano yo no

that which have 1.PL.PRES.IND laugh-PAST.PART with my brother i not

te puedo explicar

te puedo explicar

you can explain

‘You have no idea (lit.I can’t explain) how much I have laughed with my brother’

(9) Informant nr. 6

Mariano al no **haber tenido** nunca hijos

mariano al no haber ten-ido nunca hijo-s

mariano at not have INF have-PAST.PART never children

(...) la decisión de Mariano fue casarse con Amy

la decisión de mariano fue casarse con amy

the 74decision of mariano be marry amy

‘Mariano, never having had children (...) the decision of Mariano was to marry Amy’

(10) Informant nr. 7

Encima con los tres **ha convivido**

encima con los tres ha conviv-ido

in addition with the three have 3SG.PRES.IND live with-PAST.PART

‘In addition he has lived with the three of them’

(11)

Ganás muy bien me lo **han dicho** profesores

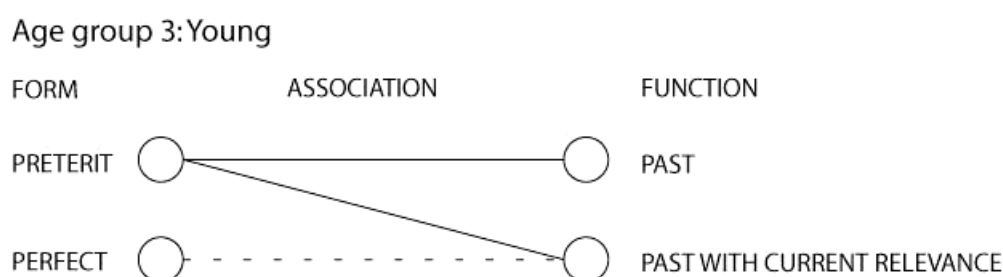
ganás muy bien me lo han di-cho profesores

win very well me have 3PL.PRES.IND say-PAST.PART professors

‘You earn a lot professors have told me’

These phrases suggest that there is no consistency in the use of the Perfect, because they all convey “current relevance” and “experiential”, functions that are all expressed by means of the Preterit by the same informants elsewhere in the data. This is precisely what we have seen in the speech of informants from age groups 1 and 2; the difference is quantitative, not qualitative. The occurrences are not of a different type, only fewer. The distribution among the young informants can be schematized the following way (note that the stippled line is weaker than in figure 2, indicating decreased frequency and less strong association):

Figure 13. Age group 3



5.1.1.4 Age group 4: Adolescent

Table 16. Age group 4

Tokens with perfect meaning	16
Of which the Perfect is used	0
O which the Preterit is used	16
Total percentage of use of Preterit	100 %

In the speech of the adolescent informants the Perfect never occurs. The Preterit seems to have completely replaced the Perfect. The distribution of the two forms among these informants can be schematized as in figure 14. This is also the probable outcome of the ongoing process of change. The following example shows how informant 10 typically uses the preterit in resultative function:

Informant nr. 10 (answering whether she has seen a pair of photos)

(12)

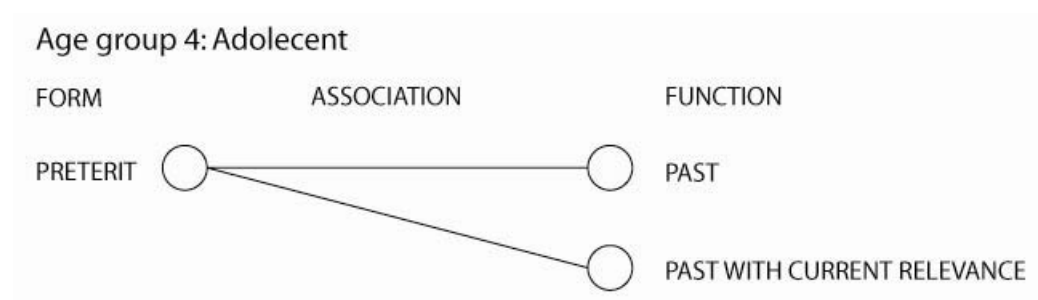
Si las **vi** las tengo en la compu las **saqué** de su página

si las **v-í** las tengo en la compu las **saqu-é** de su página

yes them see-1SG.PRET them have in the computer them take down-1SG.PRET from his page

‘Yes I have seen them I have them in the computer I have downloaded them from his webpage’

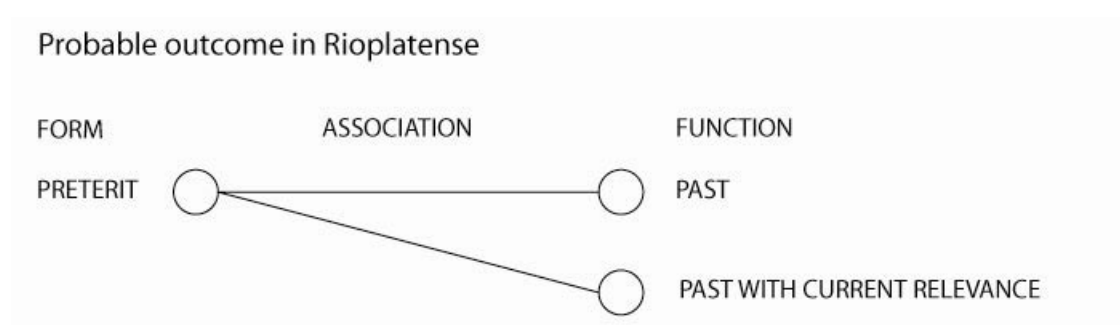
Figure 14. Age group 4



5.1.1.5 Generalization over the data

The data strongly suggest that the Preterit is generalizing in Rioplatense, and has been doing so gradually over the last hundred years. The frequency of the Preterit with the function ‘past with current relevance’ has increased from 58 % to 100 % between age group 1 and age group 4. This reveals a clear tendency, as well as it indicates the time span of the phenomenon. Today, the Preterit is functioning as a perfective in the speech of age group 4. The occurrences of Perfect in the speech of the other age groups seem to be traces of the original distinction. As shown in chapter 4 and 5, their sparse use of the Perfect seems random, because the same function may occur with both Perfect and Preterit. It seems as if all the functions are replaced to the same extent. The probable outcome of the present situation is as follows:

Figure 15. Probable outcome



5.1.1.6 The lack of 2SG Perfect tokens and the frequency of *viste*

The Perfect occurs at a total of 22 times. This is a small number; nevertheless it has a striking feature: the 2SG never occurs in the Perfect. This is puzzling since the data include a great number of tokens of the 2SG (cf. the examples). What is also striking is the high frequency of the grammaticalized construction *viste*, which has the form of a Preterit in the 2SG, and perfect function (for details see 5.2.2). The calculation of the frequency is made in the following way: in each age group the total of tokens of *viste* is compared with the tokens of the other verbs in perfect function. As we see, *viste* has a much higher percentage than these. In this way, its relative frequency compared to the other verbs is high. For instance, informant nr. 3 has 25 *viste* tokens, which makes up almost 20 % of *all* the preterit tokens. When the *viste* tokens are compared to the other preterit tokens with perfect function, the numbers are even more striking. Informant nr. 3 only had 3 tokens of other verbs in Preterit with perfect function, but had 25 tokens of *viste*. Similar distributions hold for the other informants. Informant nr. 10 had 15 tokens of Preterits in perfect function and 10 tokens of *viste* etc. The amount of *viste* tokens is actually bigger than the total of *all* other Preterit verbs in perfect function. In the following sections I will concentrate on this finding, but first I study the earlier attempts that have been made in order to explain the phenomenon

5.2 Towards an explanation?

The data presented suggest that the Preterit has completely taken over for the Perfect in Rioplatense and is generalizing to perfective. In the following sections I present possible explanations for this finding.

5.2.1 Why is it not a result of Italian influence?

The result of the extreme contact situation between Italian, Spanish and various other languages at the turn of the century was a linguistic variety. This variety has received much attention. Most famous is the label *lunfardo*, which has been subject to vigorous debate (e.g. Cancellier 1996, Gobello and Olivieri 2005). Lunfardo differs from standard Argentinean in that it extensively replaces common nouns with other, mostly Italian words, but some also have French, Portuguese, Polish and Russian origins. It has been argued that the lunfardo was a variety used by criminals only (the name, lunfardo, is said to stem from a word meaning ‘outlaw’). However, I follow Gobello and Olivieri (2005) in assuming that it is a lexical variety and a result of the many loans that occurred from Italian to Spanish at the end of the 19th century. It is neither a language, nor a dialect nor a pidgin, as suggested by some (cf. Gobello and Olivieri 2005).

As discussed in chapter 4, the sociolinguistic situation of Buenos Aires about a hundred years ago was particularly complex. About 50 % of the inhabitants in the city were foreigners, and among these, about half were Italian. Between 1855 and 1946 2,9 million Italian immigrants settled in Argentina. The non-Italian foreigners came mostly from Spain, but also from other parts of Europe and the Middle East. Due to this a situation, a discussion of whether the spread of the Preterit may have been contact induced is requested. When studying such a hypothesis in detail, two obvious questions arise:

- 1) Can we assume that the phenomenon in question (the frequent use of the Preterit in perfect function) was frequent in any of the other languages or Spanish varieties that were spoken in Buenos Aires?
- 2) If so, is it possible that such a morphosyntactic pattern has spread to Argentinean Spanish due to contact?²⁴

Let us start with question 1). If the change in Rioplatense was the result of contact, we must assume that the preterit was more frequent than the Perfect in one particularly influential dialect or variety spoken in Buenos Aires. For instance, the dialect spoken by the numerous Italian immigrants could have had this distribution between the two. As a matter of fact, the phenomenon *has* been attested for a dialect that was spoken in Buenos Aires; the southern

²⁴ According to Backus (2004), contact can lead to change due to convergence. The change takes place as degree of entrenchment of the items question change; as an item becomes increasingly used, it becomes more entrenched, and vice versa.

Italian variety (Comrie 1976:61). Still, even though the immigrants from southern Italy were numerous, most immigrants came from the northern parts. In northern Italian, the opposite phenomenon to the one in question exists: the Perfect has generalized to perfective (as in several other Romance languages, see Comrie 1976:53). However, the immigrants from the north were farmers, and settled mostly in rural areas, not in the capital (Colantoni and Gurlekian 2004). Thus, it is possible that the southern dialect was particularly influential.

Nevertheless, the Genovese dialect, which is a northern variety (and has the opposite phenomenon; the Preterit has disappeared), is claimed to have been the most influential of all the dialects spoken in Buenos Aires ca. 1900 (Baily 1999, Gobello and Olivieri 2005). This is also suggested by the large amount of loans that stem from this variety. Argentinean literary sources also suggest that the Perfect was frequently used in the Italian variety. In a play by Discépolo from the early 20th century, in which the author attempts to imitate an Italian, the Perfect is frequently used. The same holds for a play by Vacarezza from the same period. Sánchez (cf. chapter 3) also includes the Perfect frequently when he imitates Italians (e.g. 1968:108); *Ha capito* (It. 'Have you understood'), *Ha comprendido* (Sp. 'Have you understood') etc. So, even though Italian had a great importance, there is no reason to assume that the Preterit was preferred in the dialects of it spoken in Argentina.

Nevertheless, it can not be excluded that a variety that included a frequent use of the preterit could have been spoken in parts of the city. The phenomenon in question *could* hypothetically be the result of contact. Contact with the Italian language has been suggested to be the explanation for the particular intonation pattern in Buenos Aires Spanish (Colantoni and Gurlekian 2004). It is even argued that the intonation was different before the waves of immigrants started to arrive. My data also suggest that the Perfect was frequent in the 19th century as well. This leads us to question 2) above. If contact can create prosodic change, can it also create morphosyntactic changes? Can the generalization of the preterit be a contact induced change? Several factors suggest that this is less probable. First of all because, as discussed above, the number of immigrants that actually spoke such a variety is uncertain. Even if it was frequent, major sociolinguistic research is needed to decide the likelihood of a certain variety influencing other varieties, arguably with higher social status.

But most importantly (at least with the emphasis of this paper), is the question of how likely the Preterit pattern (if we assume that it was frequent), is to take over for another pattern, in this case the Perfect. According to Joan Bybee (personal communication), such a spread is

highly unlikely due to contact; the Perfect is a much more transparent category, it is more regular, and it is easier to process, because it is analytic. The Preterit, on the other hand, is highly irregular as a pattern, in addition to its being synthetic. Also, most cycles include the analytic form replacing the synthetic form, as discussed in 1.1.1. Ultimately, the nature of the spread seems incompatible with a contact hypothesis. As we have seen, and as I will return to in 5.2.2.5, the preterit seems to have spread gradually, starting in the 2SG. This is hardly compatible with a contact induced change. Therefore, such a hypothesis is too improbable to be studied further at this point.

Of course, the question that arises is *why did it spread*, and in the following sections I will present a hypothesis to account for such a change. On this view, the change is not a result of contact between languages. As argued above, there simply is nothing that indicates that a variety that included a preference for the Preterit was spoken by any majority in the Argentinean capital at the turn of the century. The following hypothesis is consistent with the findings in the data (the lack of 2SGPFCT tokens) and with the gradual nature of the spread.

5.2.2 Expansion of a construction prior to expansion of a function?

The case of *viste*

In this section I present the hypothesis that the construction *viste* served as the centre for generalization of the entire preterit category. This is because of the frequency of the construction among all age groups (as discussed in 5.1.1.6), as well as the lack of 2SGPFCT tokens. The assumption is based on the following: the construction *viste* grammaticalized in Rioplatense more than a century ago, and this specific construction has served as a starting point for the expansion of the entire category. If this is so, we are faced with a more concrete explanation of the phenomenon; no abstract cognitive levels need to be posited; we can actually observe a concrete construction and assume that this has served as an anchor for generalization (Goldberg 2006:89). Apart from being a preferred explanation since no abstract layers need to be posited, there exist substantial evidence that such a change may actually have occurred. This kind of generalization is common in language use, and in the next sections I will present psycholinguistic evidence for this from language learning and generalization. I will also refer to Buescher (2004), who notes that a similar development may have taken place in American English, where another high frequency construction denoting current relevance is suggested to have led to the generalization of the Preterit category.

5.2.2.1 Explanation of the expansion of the Perfect does not hold for the Preterit

Before continuing, it should be emphasized that an alternative explanation of the present topic is required since the explanations that account for the expansion of the perfect do not hold for the expansion of the preterit. As discussed previously, cross-linguistically, the perfect has a strong tendency to generalize and subsequently replace the preterit, this way erasing the distinction between the two. This is because of the way language is used. Bybee et al. (1994:86-87) argue that the reason for the change comes from the use of the perfect and the speaker's constant urge to present his/her contribution as relevant (cf. Grice 1975:46; Conversational Maxim of Relevance). Consequently, through emancipation, the specific features associated with the form are lost. Emancipation, as described in chapter 2, is what happens when an action, or in this case a linguistic construction, becomes dissociated from its original meaning, and becomes free to take on other communicative functions. Eventually, all that is inferred is the past element of the perfect. Dahl (1985:11) argues for the importance of conventionalized implicatures in meaning change, and suggests that these implicatures are powerful mechanisms for creating secondary foci and secondary meanings. By conventionalized implicature Dahl understands "something that can be inferred from the use of a certain category or type of expression, although it can not be regarded as belonging to its proper meaning".²⁵ On such a view, an implicature of a linguistic expression may be reinterpreted as part of the meaning of that expression, and ultimately as *the* meaning. However, a pragmatically based explanation cannot be the case for the preterit. Its semantics is very different from that of the perfect. It does not include the specific feature of *current relevance* and is somehow more general in meaning. Therefore one cannot assume that the urge to present a contribution as relevant can be the reason for the expansion of this category. It follows that these explanations do not hold for the preterit. However, such pragmatically grounded explanations seem compatible with what we know about the construction *viste*, as well as what Buescher (2004) notes about the construction 'Did I tell you' in American English. I now turn to her findings

²⁵ Note that what follows from a view on prototypes as the one advocated by Dahl (cf. also 2.2.1.1), is a much less clear borderline between implicature and meaning proper, because prototypical meaning is not defining but rather characteristic.

5.2.2.2 Buescher (2004)

As mentioned in chapter 1, Buescher (2004:9) suggests the following about the expansion of the Preterit in American English: "the extension of the simple Past is not so much an extension of a single function, but instead of a single construction which extends in its range of use". She claims this because the frequency of the construction "Did I tell you" is very high and the current relevance function of the perfect is almost entirely expressed through this single construction. In these contexts, the construction hardly ever functions as a question, as I return to below.

This is an interesting hypothesis, since it could provide further evidence for language structure being the result of speakers' experience with language. In this case, the expansion of the Preterit would be that of a concrete linguistic unit, not that of an abstract category, and the novel structure would be the emerging result of discourse. Taking the explanation to the more concrete level has obvious advantages; no non-observable abstract levels need to be hypothesized to exist (Goldberg 2006:10).

Interestingly, there exists a very similar high frequency construction in Rioplatense Spanish (to my knowledge not an idiom in other Spanish varieties). This construction is an example of what Langacker (1987:36) refers to as "the formulaic nature of language". With this it is meant that language is permeated by "conventional expressions" that would not fit into either one of the categories if we were to assume a dichotomy between syntax and lexicon. These are also essential knowledge for someone to speak a language fluently, and must be learned item-by-item because of their specificity (Goldberg 2006:13).

This construction is the following:

(12)

Viste

v-iste

see-2SG.PRET

'You saw/did you see/have you seen'

An example of the use of this construction is given in (13):

Informant nr. 13

(13)

Viste que yo voy a los escout

v-iste que yo voy a los escout

see-2SG.PRET that I go to the scouts

‘I’m a scout you know’

The verb *ver* ‘see’ is a lexical, common verb in Rioplatense. However, this construction (in 2SG) has grammaticalized and has in certain contexts only pragmatic meaning. As I return to, it is not its semantic development only that accounts for the grammaticalization, it is the fact that its use is now more defined by its relative function in discourse; it has developed into a discourse marker. This new pragmatic meaning is very similar to what Buescher (2004:9) writes about the ‘Did I tell you’-construction.

Buescher emphasizes the interactional result of the frequency of such a construction. Though this is indeed a question, she notes that it is very rarely met with a speaker turn exchange. This way the construction can instead be seen as an introduction to what the speaker is about to say, and a marker of current relevance, since it aims to mark that the information about to be provided is highly relevant. This demonstrates that the construction has become an idiom and is used as an introduction to what the speaker is about to say. The case of *viste* is similar; it usually has the form of a question, but never (in my data) has it the function of one. It has only a discourse function.

If ‘Did I tell you’ can add a flavour of current relevance to what the speaker is about to say, what then about *viste*? To answer this, we must try to define what this construction really means in the contexts where it is not used in its original sense. It is likely that it does indeed add some sort of actuality or relevance to what the speaker says. It does not imply ‘seeing’ (it has grammaticalized), but this original concrete meaning of actually seeing something may have been a way of getting the attention of the listener, or actualizing what is being said, also because it has the form of a direct question to the listener. Kuteva (2001:168) points out that one reason for why speakers use old means to express new meanings, may well be “the natural urge to be more expressive, to arrest the attention of their fellow beings”. Dixon (1994:84) also argues that “most discourse (...) is oriented to the people involved in the

speech act” (typically the 2SG). It is possible that the beginning of the expansion of the category actually had a concrete starting point in this single construction. If so, this would add interesting new views on a situation that is very difficult to explain; namely the fact that a category that is both more regular and easier processible (the Perfect) is disappearing in favour of the synthetic, irregular Preterit.

If this is right, it serves as evidence for language structure being emergent, and the result of the use of high frequency constructions; it is frequency and repetition that affect and ultimately bring about form in language. That is, such an explanation “[r]elativizes structure to speakers’ actual experience with language, and sees structure as an ongoing response to the pressure of discourse rather than as a pre-existent matrix” (Bybee and Hopper 2001:3). The *viste*-construction is experiencing pressure from discourse because of its high frequency. Finally, such a finding would support the assumption that language is “a massive collection of heterogeneous constructions, each with affinities to different contexts and in constant structural adaptation to usage” (Bybee and Hopper 2001:3). It would also be an example of what Coseriu (1954) describes as the constant resystematization of language as a result of use. In the following sections, the hypothesis that the expansion of the Preterit category actually started with the expansion of a single construction is explored.

The semantic change of a verb meaning ‘see’ into a mental state is common. Sweetser (1990) argues that this is a metaphorically motivated secondary sense, and notes that the objective, intellectual side of our mental life seems to be linked with the sense of physical vision. The concept of physical vision tends to lead to the concept of mental vision. She suggests that the fact that seeing is so often such a source meaning may stem from the fact that seeing is our primary source of objective data about the world. In addition, seeing is more or less identical for all. Also, it is parallel because both activities (seeing and understanding) share the characteristic that they both involve the ability to pick out and concentrate on one stimulus among many. An interesting implication of this view on source concepts (which also is relevant to the discussion of the theory of paths above) is that this level of language is not entirely arbitrary.²⁶ That is, whereas the fact that the verb meaning ‘to see’ has this form of expression is most certainly arbitrary, what is not is the fact that it is this very expression that takes on the meaning of ‘understanding’. It should also be noted that the grammaticalization of the construction *viste* does not lie in its semantic development (which could just as well be

²⁶ I emphasize that only parts of language is arbitrary, but Givón (1995:10) notes that from the fact that language is not 100 % arbitrary it does not follow that it is 100 % iconic; this is what he labels “the reductionist fallacy of non-arbitrariness”.

accounted for as a common metaphorical change), but in the fact that it has taken on a more pragmatic function, and no longer has the specific meaning of seeing. It has become pragmatically enriched, and this functional change is the reason why I label the change ‘grammaticalization’, and not common semantic change.

5.2.2.3 How can we assume that *viste* is old?

If we are to assume that *viste* was the starting point of the expansion of the Preterit in Rioplatense, the implication is that *viste* has been frequent for a longer time than the other Preterit forms. We do find evidence for this when studying the construction in detail, on the basis of what we know about grammaticalization changes.

Loss of semantic content indicates age, because it is the result of a grammaticalization process that does not happen overnight. This is again an indication of high frequency, because grammaticalization does not occur in infrequent constructions (see chapter 2). *Viste* must have been very frequent because it has grammaticalized (frequency is a prerequisite for grammaticalization). The grammaticalization also suggests that the construction has been frequent for some time; the older a gram is, the more does it lose semantic content, fuse with the stem and reduce its form. In this case, the process has only been manifested semantically and functionally. Since its use has broadened into having a pragmatic function in a variety of contexts, I assume it to be grammaticalizing based on the definition of such a process as the change towards a more grammatical status. Had it not been for this functional change, it could have been seen as a common metaphorical extension (cf. Sweetser 1990).

In addition, the verb *ver* does not occur with this pragmatic meaning in any other person than the 2SG.²⁷ Therefore we can conclude that it is the construction *viste*, and not the lexeme, that has grammaticalized (cf. 2.3). This serves as further evidence that grammaticalization affects the construction, not the verb, also since *viste* also may preserve the meaning of seeing, as showed in the following examples:

²⁷ A search on google.com, as well as my own knowledge of the Spanish language indicates that *ver* may also occur with pragmatic function in 2PL, even though no such tokens occur in my data. Nevertheless, this fact does not have consequences for the theory I present. It still cannot be assumed that the grammaticalization process affects the lexeme. The spread of the pragmatic use of *ver* to 2PL may also be seen as a spread parallel to the one I discuss in 5.2.2.4.

Informant nr. 8. Discourse use

(14)

Así que **viste** estoy contento con eso
asi que v-iste estoy contento con eso
so that know-2SG.PRET be happy with it
'So I'm happy with it, you know'

The same informant used the verb with its lexical meaning (the informant was talking about a movie):

Informant nr. 8. Literal use

(15)

No sé si la **viste**
no sé si la v-iste
not know if it see-2.SG.PRET
'I don't know if you have seen it'

Informant nr. 1. Discourse use

(16)

Tendrán sus cosas como tienen acá los correntinos y los qhaqueños **viste**
tendrán sus cosas como tiene acá los correntinos y los chaqueños v-iste
have their things like have here the correntinos and the chaqueños see-2SG.PRET
'They probably have their stuff like the *correntinos* and the *chaqueños* have here you know'

Can the extension of the Preterit in Rioplatense be the result of a single construction expanding, and not so much of a single function? The generalization on the basis of a single, high-frequency construction is not uncommon. In fact, this is often how and why new structures emerge (cf. the development of the *habere* + PP construction in Latin, see 2.5). The generalization over specific constructions is also well-attested (see especially Goldberg 2006). In the following section I present psycholinguistic evidence that favours such a hypothesis.

5.2.2.4 Psycholinguistic evidence

On what basis can we assume that such a generalization has taken place? First of all, a theoretical remark: within this framework, it is not assumed that the available input is too sparse to use as a base for generalizations (known as *the poverty of the input*; used as an

argument in favour of the nativism hypothesis; see for instance Pinker 1994). On the contrary; we follow Goldberg et al. (2004) in that at least certain patterns of language are possible to learn through general categorization principles.

The impact of the frequency of a single construction (token frequency) has shown to be great in various parts of language use. For instance, Bybee and Eddington (2006), in a study of change-of-state verbs in Spanish, argue that the strict categorical view on category membership has failed and that the results support exemplar representation; the construction with the highest frequency serves as the centre for the most productive categories, and functions as a point of generalization, as opposed to other, more marginal members (cf. discussion on prototypes and categorization in chapter 2).

In addition, there is substantial evidence from both language acquisition and language use that a single, high frequency construction may facilitate learning and generalization. First of all, as Goldberg (2006) points to, language learning must involve item-based memory, since the end state of a grammar is not completely general. This said, the findings on frequency effects presented in previous chapters also make such a claim more likely; the more often an item is used, the easier it is to retrieve and produce. Further, Goldberg (2006:50) argues that evidence from the category of adjectives suggests that “[i]diosyncratic facts about more high-level generalizations such as grammatical categories are retained (...)”. In addition, and more generally, there is evidence that generalizations are in fact essential to language. These factors; high frequency exemplars, item-based knowledge and the importance of generalization in language learning make the claim that such processes may also happen in change possible. In fact, Fischer (2007:325) argues that language learning actually happens via concrete tokens.

As to the learning process, there is a strong tendency for one very frequent construction dominating the use of an entire category. This may be parallel to what we saw in the findings of Buescher (2004), where the construction ‘Did I tell you’ made up almost the entire current relevance function of the perfect category. It can also be compared to the present topic; the preterit was used consistently in the 2SG before it was used in the other persons (cf. chapter 4). Subsequently, Goldberg (2006:76) claims that there may be one single high frequency exemplar for each pattern. Further, she notes that “there is a strong correlation between the frequency with which a token occurs and the likelihood that it will be considered a prototype by the learner” (2006:85), and that increased token frequency may in fact facilitate category

learning. In addition, it has been shown that the process of analogy involved in generalization is facilitated when the instances that are compared are similar to each other. This has been showed in non-linguistic testing (Goldberg 2006), and may also be the case for *viste*; its suffix (-*ste*) is the default suffix of the Spanish preterit. Therefore, because of its regularity and similarity inside the pattern, this construction may actually have led to analogy. Had the exemplars been low-similarity, such a process would not have been likely (Goldberg 2006:86). Returning to the token frequency, it has been observed that constructions seem easier to learn if they are instantiated by a single verb rather than by many different verbs. These processes may be similar to what is known as the *anchoring effect*; a high-frequency exemplar acts as a cognitive anchor; a standard of comparison, which may organize memory and help to reason about other related types (Goldberg 2006:89). It has also been shown that high frequency exemplars are more likely to serve as prototypes in categorizations. Though this may be more salient a process in semantic categorization, it is possible to suggest that a single high frequency exemplar may serve as an anchor for analogy and generalization. Goldberg et al. (2004:19) note that “[c]ategories that are identifiable with a salient type of stable feature are easier to learn than categories in which the feature is instantiated in different ways, even when the variability is relevant to the feature dimension”.

Though Goldberg et al. (2004:2) argue that “high token frequency of a single prototypical exemplar does indeed facilitate the learning of constructional meaning”, the importance of generalization in language should, however, not be restricted to learning. There is strong evidence that adults continue to generalize argument structure patterns spontaneously and that adults retain much verb-specific knowledge as well. Goldberg et al. (2004:5) claim that “[p]sycholinguistic studies have demonstrated that speakers are influenced by the relative frequencies with which they have heard particular verbs used in various argument structure constructions”. We have also seen that similar processes are at work in productivity patterns, where one high frequency exemplar serves as centre for an entire category.

However, in the preceding discussion I have omitted certain controversial elements which I will now turn to. The most problematic point seems to be that of a high-frequency construction being the centre of generalization. As Bybee (1985) points to, high token frequency is actually preventative when it comes to productivity, because high frequency items are typically not analyzed into parts. Therefore, if *viste* has a very high frequency, we would expect it to be analyzed as a whole and *not* to be segmented into stem + suffix. Subsequently, we would not expect it to be the basis for analogy. Two elements are relevant

in this respect. First is the question of what is actually meant by high frequency. This is a relative measure; a construction is necessarily frequent *compared to* other constructions. Bybee (2006:719) suggests three levels of frequency; (i) low level, (ii) higher level and (iii) extreme high frequency level. The extreme high levels can lead to grammaticalization and creation of new grammatical morphemes, but *viste* is not yet there. I therefore argue that it can be placed on level (ii), higher level, which according to Bybee can lead to the “establishment of a new construction with its own categories” (2006:719). Secondly, even though *viste* has high token frequency, it is part of a pattern that also has a high type frequency. This way, the high token frequency of the single item may function the way Bybee and Eddington (2006) describe for Spanish adjective constructions; they argue that children and adults learn a construction faster if they are exposed to one high frequency token “as well as several types that exemplify the construction” (Bybee 2007:15). Therefore, it can be argued that the high token frequency of the construction in question is not necessarily preventative as to analogy, as it is in typical morphological productive processes.

5.2.2.5 So, what happened?

I suggest that processes such as those described above may have led to the expansion of the Preterit category in Rioplatense. Not only is this intuitively more likely (a sudden abstract category change coming from nowhere seems strange); as shown, it also seems probable from a psycholinguistic point of view. Wilson (2003:6) also points out how lexical-pragmatic processes (such as narrowing, or in this case; broadening) that apply spontaneously ultimately may lead to semantic change; “what starts as a spontaneous, one-off affair may become regular and frequent enough to stabilize in a community and give rise to an extra sense”. The use of the Preterit in a new context may have been spontaneous and random, but may still have spread. So, not only is the preterit spreading; its spread seems to be headed by the generalization of *viste* 2SG > all persons.

The development can be schematized as follows:

Stage 1:

Perfect expresses perfect

Preterit expresses past

Stage 2:

Perfect expresses perfect

Preterit expresses past

Exception: *viste* expresses perfect

Stage 3:

Perfect expresses perfect

Preterit expresses past

Exception: *viste* expresses perfect and is generalizing to all verbs in 2SG; the perfect 2SG is disappearing

Stage 4:

Preterit expresses both past and perfect; 2SG preterit has generalized to all persons, and perfect is disappearing in all persons

Stage 5:

The perfect has been completely replaced by the preterit, the distinction between the two has disappeared, what is left is a perfective.

As we have seen, the effects of token frequency in language are substantial. We can imagine that for some reason (cf. the difficulties we are always faced with when determining the reasons for grammaticalization) the construction *viste* has become more frequent. This frequency has led to the spread of the Preterit to other forms of 2SG. Analogously, the Preterit has spread from the 2SG to all persons. This explains why the corpus has no tokens of the Perfect in 2SG; even the oldest informant (aged 87), who uses the Perfect quite a lot, and in all persons, consequently avoids it in the 2SG. It surely cannot be because the data lack this form; as a matter of fact, (as discussed in chapter 4), the data are full of tokens of verbs in the 2SG, because the cases in which the informants talked directly to the interviewer (that is, used the 2SG), were particularly good and frequent generators of the Preterit, so I somehow tried to lead the informants to use constructions that involved 2SG. The lack of tokens of the Perfect in the 2SG is precisely due to the fact that this is where the change manifested first. Subsequently, the change manifested throughout the entire paradigm.

Generalizing, it can be expressed as follows:

***ver* 2SG. PRET → all verbs 2SG. PRET → all verbs, all persons, PRET.**

By this is meant that from *ver* 2SG.PRET, generalizations are made first to only the 2SG, subsequently to all verbs. This way, the Preterit has spread. In the following section, I present a possible consequence of this generalization; the grammaticalization of what may become a perfect marker in Rioplatense.

5.2.3 Is *ya* grammaticalizing?

Interestingly, there are heavy constraints on the range of expressions of location in time that can be grammaticalized in a language. Tense is thus constrained; there are many logically achievable time locations, there are also many time expressions that are lexicalized. Why are so few grammaticalized? This is relevant to the discussion of grammaticalization; of all the constructions that can potentially become grammaticalized, only very few are. The tenses which are most typically grammaticalized are simple anteriority, simultaneity and posteriority; all with the present moment as the deictic centre, either in the present, past or future (Comrie 1985:11). Specificity in the tense system is quite rare; very few languages grammaticalize words such as ‘yesterday’ for instance. However, the grammaticalization of an adverb meaning ‘already’ to become a perfect marker has been attested for various languages. Dahl (1985:129) notes that the Yoruba perfect marker has derived from an adverb meaning ‘already’ and suggests that “there may well be more cases of a PFCT derived from this kind of source”. This is indeed the case, and Frawley (1992:347) notes that “in many languages, the perfect is formed solely by means of this adverb (or its equivalent)”. Apart from Yoruba, Isekiri (Bybee and Dahl 1989:68), Karaboro (Dahl 1985:129) and Ewondo (Frawley 1992:347) also express perfectivity this way, the same does Portuguese-based pidgin (Naro 2000:40). Cross-linguistically then, we observe that this is a common change and a common source meaning of a perfect marker. My data show a use of the adverb *ya*, meaning ‘already’, that may suggest that such a change is also occurring in Rioplatense.

According to Frawley (1992:347) it is the *dual structure* of the perfect that makes the frequency of adverbs with this tense so high. With *dual structure* he means that the perfect has a complex event frame, meaning that it conveys that an event is judged as prior to, or temporally up to a projected reference point. This structure makes certain adverbial

constructions particularly compatible with the perfect. So when the adverb is the only conveyer of anteriority, it is this marker that introduces the reference time that is needed to derive the perfect from the simple past.

The frequency of adverbs in constructions that convey anteriority is high, so it is expected that *ya* (as well as other adverbs, like *ahora* ‘now’, *alguna vez* ‘some time’, *recién* ‘just’ etc.) continue as highly frequent when the Preterit generalizes. However, there is reason to believe that *ya* is in the early stages of grammaticalization.²⁸ The claim is made on the basis of examples as the following:

Informant nr. 1

(17)

Mi nieta... **ya** le **dijo** la doctora que en cualquier momento va a nacer

mi nieta ya le dij-o la doctora que en cualquier momento va a nacer

my granddaughter already say 3SG.PRET the doctor that in any moment will be born

‘My granddaughter... The doctor has told her that she (i.e. her daughter) will be born soon’

Informant nr. 7

(Talking about finishing her studies, not earlier than expected)

(18)

Lo importante es que **ya** lo **pude** lograr

lo importante es que ya lo pud-e lograr

the important is that already it can-1SG.PRET achieve

‘What’s important is that I have achieved it’

(19)

Ahora **ya** se me **fue** la bronca casi

ahora ya se me fu-e la bronca casi

now already it me go-3SG.PRET the anger almost

‘Now the anger has almost gone away’

²⁸ In addition to the examples given here, there are phrases in the data in which the use of the adverb is difficult to explain, as in the following from informant nr. 6: *Nací yo después nació Fede y ya se quedaron*, lit. ‘I was born afterwards Fede was born and they **already** stayed’ (‘they’ being the parents that didn’t leave Buenos Aires, they stayed).

Informant nr.1

(20)

Yo **ya dije** que hay dos cosas que no me van a decir ”Ni puta ni peronista”

yo ya dij-e que hay dos cosas que no me van a decir ni puta ni peronista

I already say-1SG.PRET that be two things that not me will to say not a whore nor a *peronista*

‘I’ve said that there are two things that I will not be called neither a whore nor a *peronista*’

A pilot study effectuated in 2005 showed similar evidence; experientiality (a sub-function of perfect) was expressed the following way:

(21)

Ya fui a Bolivia

ya fu-i a bolivia

already go-1SG.PRET to bolivia

‘I have been to Bolivia’

Note that the Standard Spanish counterpart is as follows:

(22)

He estado en Bolivia

he est-ado en bolivia

have 1SG.PRES.IND be-PAST.PART in bolivia

‘I have been to Bolivia’

In none of the phrases above has the informant wished to convey any sense of temporal importance except from that of current relevance. In example (19), for instance, since the informant uses two temporal adverbs; *ahora* ‘now’ and *ya* ‘already’ side by side, this is an opposition that does not make much sense in this context if we are to understand *ya* as still having its lexical content.²⁹ In example (18) the informant is telling how she finished her studies. However, this did not happen any earlier than expected, it happened during the year of 2006, which was the year the interview took place, and the year she was referring to.

Of course, it is crucial to define when we are to assume that a change actually has occurred. Hopper and Traugott (2003:48) see “a single example of a change that later spreads to other

²⁹ In other contexts, such an opposition is possible. For instance, in Norwegian, the use of the adverb meaning ‘already’ is frequently used to express a state of surprise, and in such a context, this opposition is possible, as in *Skal du gjøre det allerede nå?*; ‘Are you going to do it already now?’

texts and other constructions as a “first example of change X”. They posit two criteria that serve as methodological guidelines. These criteria say that a rule change has occurred if

- a) It has evidently spread from the individual and been accepted by a group
- b) The constraints of the former linguistic environment are no longer obligatory

Using these criteria, the adverb in question can be assumed to be grammaticalizing. Criterion a) is met by the fact that several of the informants exhibit the same new pattern of use. Criterion b) is met as the adverb is no longer used to convey the actual meaning of ‘already’ in certain constructions, as seen in the examples, and therefore is used in new contexts. If the development continues, *ya* may become a perfect marker in Rioplatense in the future.

Another crucial question is *why* this particular adverb is grammaticalizing. As will be discussed in 5.3, it is difficult in cases like these to come up with any valid explanation. An obvious factor involved is frequency; *ya* is a high-frequency word, and if it were not, it would not have started to grammaticalize. This was discussed in chapter 2; frequency is a necessary prerequisite for grammaticalization, but it is not itself enough. This fact is indeed illustrated by this change, since we know that adverbs like *ya* have high frequency in constructions that convey anteriority, but we also know that the grammaticalization process has not taken place in all of the languages where this is the case. Because of this, we can also use the case of *ya* to dismiss the functionality explanation of grammaticalization. If it is the case that *ya* eventually does become a perfect marker, this way creating a new category, it would be wrong to assume that this is in order to maximize functionality. This is because the perfect is not a universal category, so a language is not more functional if it has this category. In addition, Rioplatense is experiencing a change that is erasing the perfect category, but we do of course not want to assume that Rioplatense at the present stage is dysfunctional.

Surprisingly, Bybee and Dahl (1989:68) seem to argue *for* a functionalistic explanation for adverbs becoming grammaticalized where there is no perfect category. They state:

“It may be noted that in languages without a grammatical perfect (such as Russian), morphemes meaning 'already' may be used more extensively than in English *to make up for the lack of a perfect* as it were. In some languages in Dahl's material (e.g. Karaboro, a Gur language), similar particles seem to be on their way to being grammaticized as perfects.” (my italics)

Nevertheless, such a statement need not be interpreted as functionalism. Perhaps what is meant is that adverbs may be used more extensively in languages without perfect markers, because this is the only means by which the current relevance of a situation can be emphasized when they are using a past that does not in itself convey current relevance. By using the adverb they convey the so called dual structure of the perfect; *ya* includes the notion of present, of current relevance (cf. 2.2.1.1). The adverb is used frequently and is eventually interpreted as adding a flavour of relevance, and adds the meaning of something happening ‘prior to’ or ‘previously’ in a more general way. Still, adverbs meaning ‘already’ do not *have* to grammaticalize, even though they are frequent. In the following sections the question of what mechanism lead to change is discussed.

5.3 What leads to change?

Three different questions can be formulated in approaching explanations on language change. They are all on different levels, and can be schematized as follows:

- 1) Why do languages change?
- 2) When they change, why do they change the way they do?
- 3) How can such individual changes create entire structures?

Question 2) is what has been most elaborated on in the present. Both question 1) and 2) can tentatively be answered by reference to general cognitive mechanisms, whereas 3) is of a more substantial character. None of the explanations I will present provide any explanations of why certain constructions change, while others, with the same starting point, do not.

5.3.1 Why do languages change?

Even though this issue has been largely omitted in the present work, it is a matter of controversy whether the emerging structures in grammaticalization arise because of functional needs or because of grammar’s way of changing as a result of accumulation of forms. That is, should it be seen as the result of communicative needs, i.e. as functional, or as the result of language changes that only happen because they happen, without any higher goal, i.e. as mechanistic?

Some scholars advocate the functional explanation. Heine et al. (1991:29) stress that grammaticalization is the “[r]esult of a process that has problem solving as its main goal, whereby one object is expressed in terms of another”. Hopper and Traugott argue that “[m]aximization of economy or simplicity” (2003:71), in other words, informativeness and efficiency, are the main motivations behind change. Here I rather categorically dismiss the functionalistic explanation. This is because no grammatical category is universal, so to argue that any category develops to fulfil some sort of demand is not compatible with the assumption that all mother tongues are fully communicative. For instance, in the developments studied in the present paper, several different stages are observed; the varieties in question alternate between stages with and without preterit/perfect distinction. Therefore, I follow Keller (1994:145) in that “language evolution is definitely not teleological. There is no definite present goal that has to be achieved [...]”. In addition, the fact that layering (the existence of different forms to convey the same function) exists is in itself incompatible with a functionalistic explanation; grammaticalization can occur where perfectly well functioning versions exist (as in the case of the Romance future). Yet another factor makes the idea of a functional explanation unlikely. Grammaticalization changes do not happen abruptly. The changes happen gradually (cf. the definition in 2.3). It took the *habere* + PP construction several hundred years to completely grammaticalize. How is this supposed to be given a functional explanation? We cannot assume that a speaker, when first using a form in a somewhat new way, does this with the intention of creating, say, a perfect marker several hundred years later. Bybee et al.’s (1994) view seems far more reasonable; the change happens because it happens, it is just the accumulating effect of language use that makes the words become grammatical markers.

Bybee et al. (1994) argue strongly against any sort of functional explanation. They argue that the relationship between grammatical structures and functional categories is indirect and mediated by diachronic processes (1994:298), and that this process happens for its own sake. Its systematic nature and the fact that the grammaticalization paths cross-linguistically show similarities can be accounted for by the underlying cognitive and communicative structures that govern language use. This is why she concludes (2003:2) that universals of change are the “true universals”. As discussed, Bybee (2002) argues that *repetition* is the triggering force behind grammaticalization. She attributes this to the general cognitive ability of *ritualization*. Bybee (2002:604) states that “[f]requency of use leads to weakening of semantic force by habituation - the process by which an organism ceases to respond at the same level to repeated stimulus”; the generalization comes about as a result of the habituation the frequency leads to.

The impact of frequency should not be confused with being an *explanation* of grammaticalization. Frequency is a prerequisite for grammaticalization, but not in itself enough. As we have seen, constructions can be both very frequent as well as become frequent without the hallmark of grammaticalization. All in all, the phenomena treated in this work all challenge a functionalistic explanation of language change. This is simply because they exemplify change towards different stages, so arguing that functionality is what drives these changes would imply arguing that the original states were dysfunctional. This is not what we want to argue.

So, explaining grammaticalization with repetition only takes us so far. *Why* are certain forms repeated? According to Bybee, this has to do with what we actually talk about and the way we tend to structure our conversations. Through this process, a sequence of morphemes or words becomes automated as a single processing unit, i.e. is grammaticalized. Still, many high frequency constructions never grammaticalize. What determines which ones do?

5.3.2 When they change, why do they change the way they do?

The question of what happens once a construction has started to change has been treated thoroughly throughout the present paper, so I will not go into further detail here. In addition, it is a continuation of the explanations above; once a construction has started to change, it will undergo the changes that follow frequency increases. These changes are ultimately driven by the general cognitive abilities mentioned above. This is precisely the reason why predictions are actually possible at this stage. There are therefore two different levels of prediction involved; the one that concerns the change in the first place (see next section), and that of the continuing development of a grammaticalizing gram. They refer to question 1) and 2) above.

5.3.3 How can such individual changes create new structures?

This question is not uniquely relevant to language; it has to do with how structure arises in the first place, through use, unintended. It involves the basic question of how structure in itself is created. In the following section, I will briefly present a relevant theory originally not applied to language. This is *the theory of the invisible hand*. According to Keller (1994:15), who first applied the theory on language, it is impossible to understand the “[n]ature or essence of this social structure unless one has understood the logic of its genesis”. He argues that the model

is not only applicable to social structures, but to linguistic structures as well. I will now go through the main lines, as presented in Keller (1994).

The *theory of the invisible hand* treats the question of how unintended changes create structure. The actions of individuals have a goal, but not in the classical sense (we do not assume that a change is planned): the *goal* cannot be intentionally driven (the goal here being a change; the creation of a category etc.), but the action itself can. Subsequently, language use can be intentional in the sense that its intentions are present at the moment the action is executed. For example, a speaker can avoid a certain form in order not to be misunderstood. This act would be intentional in the sense that its intentions are present at the moment the action is executed, but not in the sense that it involves planning of consequences.

Keller exemplifies the working of the invisible hand with a semantic change that has occurred in German. There used to exist a pair of homonyms, *englisch* (the adjective of ‘England’) and *englisch* (meaning ‘angelic’), of which the latter meaning has disappeared. According to Keller, this resulted in ambiguity. However, we can assume that language use is governed by maxims (Grice 1975), or *charges* (Slobin 1979:188-194). These include the need to be clear, processible, quick and easy and expressive (the former both semantically and rhetorically). So, in order to fulfil these demands, a speaker of German might avoid one of the two forms so that he/she would not be misunderstood (cf. the mentioned ambiguity). This is an intentional act.

However, there is no reason why one and not the other of the two homonyms would disappear. There isn’t even a good reason why *any* of them would disappear, since there do exist a variety of homonyms in any language. This change did not *have to* happen. Therefore, it is the invisible hand comes in and ‘decides’, creating an explanandum. The change has occurred, spontaneously, not “intentionally, nor to a plan, nor consciously” (Keller 1994:13). In this view, change is the unintended result of participating individuals. The *invisible hand* comes about as many people do the same thing; the condition for the intentional actions to come about and make an invisible hand process is that they show relevant similarities in at least one aspect. That is, not all individuals need to participate.

Keller’s view is to some extent concordant with Bybee’s view. Bybee (2006) argues that change is the result of automatization and inferencing. This builds up through multiple representations as language is being used by individual speakers. Just as Keller, she

emphasizes the individual in the unconscious contribution to a greater whole, in this case a change, or a structure. Keller argues that “[t]he changes of tomorrow are consequences of our acts of communication of today” (1994:14), and this statement is concordant with Bybee’s view, whose more specific claim is that “[g]rammar is the cognitive organization of one’s experience with language” (2006:711), and Greenberg’s view that all language states are the product of change (Greenberg 1969). According to Bybee, these mechanisms operate on language in predictable ways (the paths of development). She compares the emergence of grammatical structure with the way termites build nests, that is, how a complex structure can emerge from the repetition of many local actions by individuals. Just as termites when building a nest, language users produce many local and specific actions in the process of communicating. This repetition leads to automatization, reduction of form, habituation and generalization of meaning, as well as the conventionalization of pragmatic inference. The increased frequency of a grammaticalized form gives, according to Bybee et al., evidence for the usage based nature of grammar, since these forms can end up creating new grammatical categories.

Even though these theories are interesting, they have a limited explanatory power. Keller argues that understanding what produces a change is pivotal in order to understand the process itself. This is true, and precisely the understanding of these mechanisms is what Bybee et al. (e.g. 1994) aim at. Keller’s problem is that when it comes to grammaticalization, the theory of the invisible hand does not make anything clearer. Keller’s example referred to above is interesting, but it is not comparable to the grammaticalization process: the latter does not occur where there is a need to be understood better or to avoid confusion. It occurs where everything is functioning perfectly well.

Therefore, Keller’s claim that “the invisible hand explanation is the only way language change can be explained” (sic!) (1994:155) can hardly be taken seriously. The invisible hand theory is not an explanatory theory; in my view it is more a metaphor of a change that has already taken place; an educated look back, a post hoc illustration. Its problem is precisely the inability to predict; the main question here is what is referred to as “the problem of actuation” (Weinreich et al. 1968), which concerns how a certain change was initiated *in the first place*, and which was formulated as question 1) in 5.3. When it comes to grammaticalization, this is particularly difficult. This is because grammaticalization occurs in a context that is ‘perfect’, because we, as shown in 5.3.1, do not assume that grammaticalization occurs for any therapeutic reason. Looking back, several similarities among the constructions that have

changed can be pointed to; they have certain source meanings in common, they were all high frequent etc. We still can not predict on this level. All languages have several high frequency constructions that never grammaticalize. And as shown in the present work, predictions about the continuing development of a grammaticalizing construction must also be made with reservation (e.g. Fischer 2007:326).

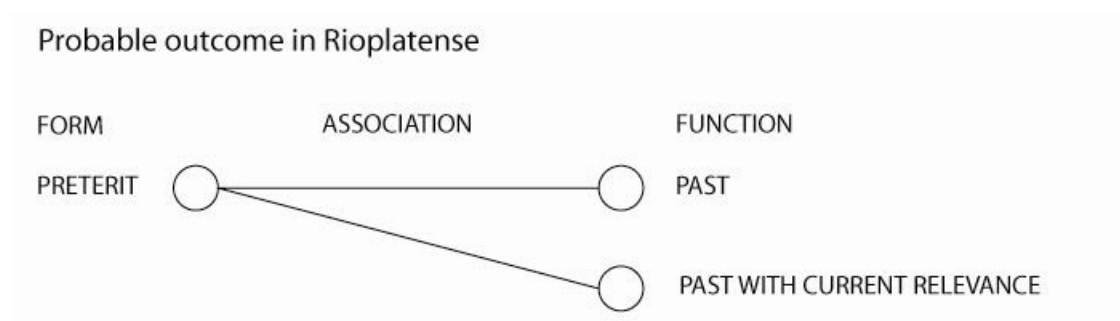
5.4 Conclusion

5.4.1 What has happened?

The main finding in the present work is that the distinction between the Preterit and the Perfect is disappearing from Rioplatense Spanish. This claim is made on the basis of data from informants from four age groups. The frequency of the Perfect gradually decreases; whereas the frequency of the Preterit in perfect function increases. The use of different age groups as variable has revealed another important finding with respect to the distribution of the preterit/perfect. The perfect is dramatically more frequent among the old informants (age group 1). It gradually decreases in the age groups. In age group 1, the preterit is used instead of the perfect to convey anteriority in 58 % of the cases. In age group 2 the percentage has increased to 89 %, in age group 3 to 96 % and eventually in age group 4 the preterit is used in 100 % of the cases where perfectivity is expressed morphologically. This indicates that the change has happened during the last hundred years. Literary sources confirm it, as seen in chapter 4.

We have also observed a gradual spread of the preterit from being used only in 2SG to generalize to all persons (cf. 5.2.2.5). This way, five different stages have been identified. These stages, as well as the percentages from the four age groups, make up good evidence for the gradual spread of the phenomenon, as well as the time span. The seeming outcome of the change in Rioplatense is as follows (which is identical to the distribution in age group 4):

Figure 16. Probable outcome



5.4.2 Why has it happened?

A change has, unexpectedly, happened in Rioplatense. Why? In the preceding chapters we have eliminated several tentative explanations:

1. The Old Spanish-hypothesis (e.g. Penny 2000): the preference for the Preterit is a consequence of contact with Spanish colonizers who “brought” this variety. This is unlikely for several reasons, but above all because the Perfect *has* existed in Rioplatense, and still to some degree does (as illustrated in literature, see chapter 3). If the Spanish that was introduced to the natives did not have Perfect, this does not fit. Also, Standard Spanish, even in the 15th century, had Perfect (there exists evidence for the Latin *habere* + PP constructions grammaticalizing from Plautus who lived around year 200 BC); so that the colonizers for some reason would not use it is not likely.

2. The contact hypothesis: Since the number of Italian immigrants to Buenos Aires was high, it is possible to question whether the change was contact induced. This is also consistent with what we know about the time span of the change in question. Nevertheless, this is unlikely. First of all because there is evidence that the most influential Italian variety in Buenos Aires was the Genovese, in which the preterit has been replaced by the perfect. Secondly, even if there was an influential dialect spoken in Buenos Aires in which the preterit was preferred, it is unlikely that this pattern would replace the more regular and transparent perfect pattern. Also, from a sociolinguistic point of view, it is unclear whether an arguably more low status variety could influence the standard variety to such an extent.

3. The relevance driven hypothesis (e.g. Bybee et al. 1994): The wish to present utterances as relevant to the listener is an explanation of the expansion of the perfect category, since it in itself includes a flavour of relevance. Because of this pragmatically driven element, the

perfect is extensively used, but through ritualization caused by increased frequency, it loses its specific meaning component of relevance. This explanation does however not hold for the preterit, because the preterit does not add a flavour of relevance to the phrase. However, moving from the category level to the level of the concrete construction, it is possible that such a pragmatically grounded explanation may hold for the *viste*-construction presented in 5.2.2. In the following section I present evidence in favour of the *viste*-hypothesis.

5.4.3 What calls for the *viste*-hypothesis?

Since none of the above explanations provide any answers, I argue that the hypothesis that the expansion of the preterit is the result of the expansion of a single construction (*viste*) should not be overlooked. As shown, this hypothesis is consistent with psycholinguistic realities. Three additional factors work in favour of the *viste*-hypothesis.

1. The change has manifested first in the 2SG. No tokens of 2SGPFCT occur in the whole data material. Though sparse, tokens of the Perfect in all other persons do occur. This is a striking feature which is difficultly explained if we assume that the change has taken place on the category level.
2. The Past Perfect *does* occur in Rioplatense. This may indicate that the change that has occurred has taken place on the concrete construction level. If *viste* is the reason for the generalization of the preterit, this explains why another instantiation of the perfect category (though in another tense), which has elsewhere disappeared, continues to exist. If the change had happened on an abstract category level, we would expect all tenses of this category to disappear.
3. The way the change has been shown to have spread (gradually from the 2SG to other forms), is difficult to fit with a contact hypothesis. Why would the change start in 2SG if it took place on the abstract category level? In fact, if the change were the result of contact, we would expect the change to happen gradually in *all* persons, not to manifest first in a single person (as it has in 2SG).

As a whole, these factors suggest that the change has not happened on the category level, but rather on the construction level. As we have seen, such an approach is compatible both with

what we know about psychological realities in language use, as well as other features on the data material, that is, the existence of the Past Perfect and the nature of the spread.

5.4.4 What do these findings imply?

It is interesting to view the present findings in a theoretical light. As mentioned initially, the findings seem to be incompatible with Bybee et al.'s (1994) predictions about developing **source meanings**. The findings presented in the present paper do indeed challenge Bybee et al.'s (1994:12) strong claim that “the source meaning uniquely determines the grammaticization path that the gram will travel in its semantic development”. In this case, the source meaning has not travelled the expected path in its semantic development. In fact, we are presented with what seems to be an exception from the Perfective Path. The spread of the preterit is not accounted for in the theory of paths. The sudden halt in the cline is very recent. Until the end of the 19th century, everything was happening exactly as expected. The Latin resultative construction had developed into a perfect, gradually broadening its functional applicability. It coexisted with the preterit in Romance, until the expected happened: the perfect generalized to perfective. This has happened in French, Romanian, north Italian and is happening in several varieties of Spanish. In Rioplatense, it seemed to be happening as well. Literary sources from ca. 1900 suggest that the perfect was indeed frequent. Nevertheless, at some point, it stopped. Everything was happening by the book when a sudden halt occurred. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the source meaning does not “uniquely” determine the future development of a grammaticalizing construction, or at least moderate it to a statistical deviation.

The development in Rioplatense went as follows:

source meaning: possession → resultative → perfect ↗ perfective

As we see, the path stopped on the ‘perfect’ stage, it never reached the ‘perfective’ stage. It is in fact preterit that has generalized to perfective:

preterit → perfective

In addition to challenge the hypothesis of the predictions of semantic development based on source meanings, the case in question exemplifies several more expected characteristics of

language and language change. The inability to predict has been touched upon; even though there are statistics that show the tendency of source meanings to develop in certain ways, this does not always hold. As noted by Buescher (2004), it does not for American English.

Also, two additional findings exemplify the two levels of prediction presented in chapter 5. In the cases of *viste* and *ya*, the fact that the two grammaticalize was not possible to predict, because the same constructions can exist in other languages without ever grammaticalizing. They did not *have to* change. Still, as the grammaticalization happens, it is possible to predict which source meanings will be grammaticalized; ‘see’ can, but ‘stare’ never would. ‘Already’ often does, but ‘immediately’ is unlikely to, etc.

Above all, the findings support a view that emphasizes the impact **frequency** has on language structure. If we accept the hypothesis that *viste* was the centre of analogy of the preterit category, we are actually faced with a case of the frequency of a single construction erasing the distinction between two categories. This would indeed support the claim that frequency has an impact on structure. Intuitively, this seems plausible; it is difficult to imagine how a sudden abstract category change would take place without any external anchoring point. The single construction is therefore seen as the point of departure for the extension of the whole category. As illustrated, there is substantial psycholinguistic evidence to support this claim.

It is difficult not to conceive at last parts of language knowledge as **procedural** seen in the light of these findings. For instance, in the possible grammaticalization process of the adverb *ya*, what we see is a type of knowledge highly affected by frequency; a unit becomes larger with repetition (the unit in question being *ya* + PRET), as recurring sequences of actions come to be represented as a single action (Boyland 1998). If *ya* becomes grammaticalized, the construction *ya* + PRET would not be conceived as different parts but as a unified whole. If linguistic knowledge were declarative knowledge, frequency would not have such an impact.

All in all, the dynamic nature of grammar is illustrated with the present cases. In the span of only four generations, the past system in Rioplatense has changed radically, possibly as a direct result of the frequency of a single construction. The creative role of repetition has once again culminated in a structural result. As quoted initially, Langacker (1987) argues that understanding the nature of change is pivotal for understanding the organization of language. The present findings emphasize how frequency, leading to change, is the main and continuous creator of category structure.

6. Summary

The present work has described the loss of a distinction in a variety of Spanish, that is, the generalizing of Preterit into perfective in Rioplatense. I have shown that the frequency of the Perfect has gradually diminished in four generations, as demonstrated in the speech of informants with ages ranging from 14 to 87. On this basis, we can assume the following; first, that a major morphosyntactic change has taken place in Rioplatense; the Perfect has disappeared from the speech of the young speakers; a distinction is lost. Second, using age as a variable has revealed that the change is very likely to have taken place during the last hundred years. This is assumed both on the basis of oral sources of old informants, and after investigating the distribution between the perfect and the preterit in plays from the end of the 19th century, which all show a frequency of the perfect as expected in a standard variety. The synchronic description has revealed a diachronic element.

All in all, an exception to the paths of Bybee et al. has been identified: a seeming predictable path may stop. Instead of the predicted development **perfect** → **perfective**, the perfect has disappeared in favour of the preterit, which has generalized; **preterit** → **perfective**. This is a reminder that reconstruction on the basis of grammaticalization clines is impossible. It also illustrates that only looking at a synchronic layer may indeed be misleading.

Apart from these findings, two elements in the data have been too salient to overlook. First, that the adverb *ya* ('already') can be assumed to be in the early stages of grammaticalization, based on its use in contexts where no element of 'prior to, before expected' etc. (the typical original meanings of *ya*) is intended.

Second, the existence of a grammaticalized construction with the form of a past, *viste* is too outstanding to be overlooked. I have investigated whether such a single construction may have served as a centre and kick off point for the extension of the entire category. Of all the occurrences of the perfect, not once does it occur in the second person singular (2SG). The change has manifested itself first in the 2SG, which may be the direct result of the frequency of *viste*. I have argued that this is the result of a generalization of the construction *viste* mentioned above; analogous with this, the preterit has spread to the entire paradigm. I have shown that such a development may well be consistent with construction-based approaches to learning and generalization, and also show that such changes do occur in other language processes, such as productivity and categorization.

6.1 Ideas for further research

The possibilities for further research in several of the fields I have touched upon in the present work are vast. Above all, the distribution of the preterit and perfect in not only southern American varieties of Spanish, but also South Italian and American English deserves a lot more attention. It is surprising that such important exceptions to the *paths of development* presented in Bybee et al. (1994) have not been subject to more careful studies.

More specifically, my data from Uruguay and other Argentinean cities reflect substantial differences in very limited geographical areas. These (as well as the data from Buenos Aires) show great variation between age groups as well. Sociolinguistically, there are several interesting possibilities. Is the same phenomenon observed in groups with different education levels? Since the Uruguayan data suggest that lower education equals more use of the perfect, this would be an obvious (and tempting!) starting point. Worth mentioning is also the possible Italian influence on the Buenos Aires variety; I have touched upon it, but the present format is too limited to really look into it. This is tempting as to further research. So is the Italy-case: why is the same phenomenon observed in certain parts of Southern Italy?

Since I have collected substantial amounts of data that I have not been able to use yet, from different cities both in Uruguay and Argentina, a thorough study of these is an obvious possibility for further research. No description of Uruguayan Spanish does (to my knowledge) exist, so this would be a particularly valuable possibility for further research.

Also, the constructionist view on the subject is a very new one and most certainly calls for further investigation. Such an approach has not yet been applied to diachronic studies, but broadening its scope could be an interesting approach to further research. For instance, a study on possible parallel cases of a single construction possibly leading a category change would be needed in order to judge the likelihood of this hypothesis.

Ultimately, I would like to stress that the present case calls for more thorough studies from a semantic/pragmatic point of view. We know that the expansion of perfects may have to do precisely with its semantics and functions, but since the same does not hold for the preterit category, this provides a particularly interesting point of departure for further studies.

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